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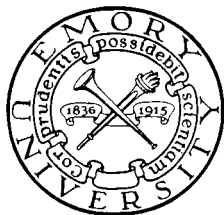
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THE LORD HERMITAGE.

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LORD HERMITAGE

A NOVEL

BY
JAMES GRANT
AUTHOR OF 'THE ROMANCE OF WAR'

LONDON
GEORGE ROUTLEDGE AND SONS
BROADWAY, LUDGATE HILL
NEW YORK: 416 BROOME STREET

P R E F A C E.

IN the following pages the character of the Russian Colonel, Mouravieff, can scarcely be deemed overdrawn, when we remember the recent crimes of Prince Davidoff and his three bravoës. An officer killing the wounded, as described in the text, was taken prisoner by our troops at Inkermann ; and a feat of courage such as that performed by the hero was actually done on the same field by a soldier of our 49th Regiment, or Hertfordshire.

Of the daring length to which Russian officers will carry the spy-system we had a proof in the April of this year, when a party of them, disguised as Circassians, were actually detected in an attempt to visit our fleet at Ismid, with a view to learn its strength and purpose.

With regard to the peculiar character of Salome—one at which some may be disposed to cavil or speculate—I can only plead that I have, as Lord Lytton says, ‘availed myself of the marvellous agencies which have ever been at the legitimate command of the fabulist.’

25, TAVISTOCK ROAD, WESTBOURNE PARK, W.
May, 1878.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE OTTER HUNT - - - -	9
II. HAPPY DAY-DREAMS - - - -	15
III. THE CASTLE OF DELORAINE - - - -	23
IV. AT FAIRY KNOWE - - - -	26
V. GLADYS MELVILLE - - - -	33
VI. AMONG THE RHINNS OF GALLOWAY - - - -	39
VII. THE SECRET MARRIAGE - - - -	45
VIII. IN THE CURSAAL - - - -	51
IX. THE DESPAIR OF THE LOST - - - -	58
X. A SAD SEQUEL - - - -	64
XI. AT THE WHITE WICKET - - - -	72
XII. WHICH CONTAINS MUCH IN LITTLE - - - -	78
XIII. 'VARIUM ET MUTABILE SEMPER FEMINA' - - - -	86
XIV. 'I WILL FORGET HER' - - - -	90
XV. MARRIED - - - -	97
XVI. THE TWO FUNERALS - - - -	102
XVII. FORTH INTO THE WORLD - - - -	107
XVIII. A GIPSY DEN - - - -	111
XIX. A DISCOVERY - - - -	119
XX. URIAH GRIPPIE LAYS DOWN THE LAW - - - -	127
XXI. LONDON - - - -	136
XXII. GERARD'S SECRET - - - -	141
XXIII. THE BROTHERS PART - - - -	148
XXIV. JULIAN'S PROFITABLE INVESTMENT - - - -	152
XXV. TRIALS AND STRUGGLES - - - -	160
XXVI. GERARD MEETS WITH AN ENIGMA - - - -	171

CHAPTER	PAGE
XXVII. MORE MYSTERY - - - - -	178
XXVIII. SALOME - - - - -	184
XXIX. FATHER AND SON - - - - -	190
XXX. NUMBER THIRTY-ONE - - - - -	194
XXXI. AMY KERR - - - - -	204
XXXII. UNDER THE LINDENS - - - - -	213
XXXIII. IN THE CURSAAL AGAIN - - - - -	219
XXXIV. THE SECRET CHAMBER - - - - -	226
XXXV. A FAREWELL LETTER - - - - -	233
XXXVI. WHO SALOME WAS SUPPOSED TO BE - - - - -	237
XXXVII. GERARD IN LONDON AGAIN - - - - -	244
XXXVIII. IN PARK LANE - - - - -	249
XXXIX. WITH THE HEAD-QUARTER STAFF - - - - -	254
XL. THE ADVANCED SENTINEL - - - - -	261
XLI. THE SORTIE OF THE 26TH OCTOBER - - - - -	268
XLII. THE WOUNDED ZOUAVE - - - - -	274
XLIII. AMY'S HANDKERCHIEF - - - - -	282
XLIV. THE ZOUAVE - - - - -	289
XLV. 'THE SOLDIERS' BATTLE' - - - - -	307
XLVI. THE CAVERN - - - - -	318
XLVII. IVAN MOURAVIEFF - - - - -	324
XLVIII. REVELATIONS - - - - -	334
XLIX. THE EFFECT PRODUCED - - - - -	340
L. THE CAPTURE OF KINBOURN - - - - -	348
LI. THE RECONNAISSANCE TOWARDS KHERSON - - - - -	359
LII. PRISONER OF WAR - - - - -	366
LIII. THE 'FLOWER OF THE FOREST' - - - - -	372
LIV. OFF STAMBOUL - - - - -	378
LV. JULIAN'S PRISON - - - - -	389
LVI. JULIAN'S VISITOR - - - - -	396
LVII. THE BEAR IN LOVE - - - - -	402
LVIII. ON THE WATERS OF THE EUXINE - - - - -	410
LIX. A FUTILE FLIGHT - - - - -	416
LX. IN THE GULF OF PEREKOP - - - - -	425
LXI. OFF CAPE KALDANTIN - - - - -	433
LXII. CONCLUSION - - - - -	441

THE LORD HERMITAGE.



CHAPTER I.

THE OTTER HUNT.

‘WHAT fellow is this, and how comes it that he dares to interfere with the sport?’ cried Lord Hermitage, furiously. ‘Bring him before me,’ he added, deliberately unwinding the cutting lash of his heavy hunting-whip.

But not a man of all the many present would lay a hand upon the youth thus discourteously addressed, as he dared them all to the death, and grasped the butt-end of his fishing-rod, which was furnished with a steel pike of formidable aspect.

‘Who are you, fellow?’ asked Lord Hermitage, sternly.

‘One who is not wont to be addressed in such a tone,’ replied the lad, proudly, but looking as if he meant mischief, and with a furious expression in his dark face. The heir of Deloraine paused ere venturing to strike with his whip; and at that precise moment it would not have been very safe work to have done so.

His defier was a bold and beautiful lad, with an athletic and well-knit figure, a fine aquiline face and dark eyes, that were now flashing with fire as he confronted, face to face and front to front, the brutal and imperious man, for such he was, whom he now saw for the first time.

‘Pardon me, my lord,’ said a gentleman, pressing forward and arresting the uplifted whip, ‘but you must not strike this lad.’

The speaker was Colonel Kingsmuir of Kingsmuir, a fine old country and courteous gentleman, and one possessed of great influence in that pastoral district.

‘And why, pray?’ continued the other, choking with rage. ‘Has he not concealed the otter somewhere, and struck down our best dogs?’

‘He is a friend of mine.’

‘Oh, indeed, Colonel,’ said Hermitage, scowling, for by nature he was cruel, suspicious, and tyrannical.

‘Yes—and he was with my family at the last county ball. How are you, Julian?—tell me all about this.’

‘So his name is Julian,’ said Lord Hermitage. ‘What more?’

‘Julian Melville—he is the grandson of the old Captain who lives at the Fairy Knowe, one of the prettiest places in the Forest.’

A close observer might have seen the deadly pallor that came over the face of Hermitage as the Colonel, all unconscious of the effect of his words, said this, and checking his horse, Lord Hermitage permitted the crowd of hunters and spectators to close between him and the object of his wrath.

And now to explain the meaning of these words, and who the persons were that uttered them.

Julian Melville—of whom and his family we shall have much to relate anon—a fine, manly fellow, as we have said, though not yet in his twentieth year, had been quietly fishing in one of the many clear and silvery tributaries of the Tweed which roll through the pastoral and mountainous district of Selkirk, known, *par excellence* still, in song and story, as the Forest of Ettrick.

For hours, with all the characteristic patience of an angler, the lad had been whipping the stream, and with some success, as his basket attested, but in this pleasant task he was assisted by a companion of a very unusual kind.

This was nothing more or less than an otter, one of the common kind, which, when spotted with white, is called by the Scottish peasantry, the ‘King of the Otters.’ This animal he had caught when young, among the reeds in ‘lone St. Mary’s Loch.’ He carried home the cub in his fish-basket, and had so domesticated and trained it, that it responded to his voice like a dog, and he taught it to fish for him, regularly laying the spoil at his feet and diving in for more, after he had caressed it, and given it some crumbs of biscuit.

No doubt that, as a pet, it was a singular one, for its nose and the corners of its mouth being furnished with long and bristling whiskers, its appearance was somewhat formidable.

Its legs were short, strong, broad, and muscular. Save for the spots, its colour was a deep brown, and it was about three feet long from the nose to the tip of its tail.

Accompanied, then, by this strange companion, which in the olden time might have involved him in some peril in that superstitious district, Julian Melville, expectant of a meeting with one who shed much brightness over his life then, had been quietly pursuing his fly-fishing, in a wild and solitary place where the stillness was unbroken by a sound, though the shepherds were wont to own that, in the grassy dell through which the trout-stream brawled, the jingle of unseen bridles ringing in the air often indicated the progress of a fairy journey, till he reached the ruin of an old cottage, half hidden amid the gigantic broom, some of which was blooming in perfection, and part in rottenness and decay, as it is a curious fact with regard to the history of this hardy plant, that it attains its full growth in about eight years, and years again must elapse ere its fallen seed will vegetate.

Often the lad raised his head from the brown eddies in the stream and looked around him to where towered in solitude the mighty peaks of the Southern Highlands, a series of grassy heights, nearly all more than two thousand feet above the sea, intersected by gulleys, glens, and narrow vales, a continuous sea of hills, without one mark of life or the dwelling-place of man upon its undulating surface.

Suddenly a series of sounds came down the glen upon the breeze, and, swooping along the rushy bank of the mountain stream, the otter hunters, with a pack of hounds, came like a whirlwind, with noisy shouts and shrill yelpings and barking, accompanied by two gentlemen on horseback, to wit, the Lord Hermitage and his host, Colonel Kingsmuir, who by chance had met the party, and, constrained by the former, the latter had joined for the nonce in this brutal sport, of which he by no means approved.

In some anxiety for his tamed pet, Julian snatched it from the water, and concealing it in a hole in the ruined wall of the old cottage, stopped the aperture with his fish-basket and coat, and in his shirt-sleeves stood, rod in hand, listening to the baying of the hounds and watching the progress of the hunt as it wound round a bend in the stream.

The pack soon passed where he stood, and, little suspecting where his otter lurked, were diligently scouring the stream, and passed the ruined cottage.

A man now rushed in front, to prevent the object of which they were in pursuit from getting into too deep water ; but soon after the hounds doubled back, and he joined them.

‘There he is, my lord—there he is, gentlemen!’ cried this fellow, who was clad in a hodden-grey suit and peasant’s bonnet, and who was half shepherd, wholly poacher, and named Ringan Jannock ; and as he spoke, the brown-furred body of an otter was seen emerging from the shallower part of the stream, and rapidly scurrying across a dry portion of the bed, from which it plunged into deeper water, just as the whole of the excited pursuers came up.

Fast and fiercely the hounds took up the scent, but, after going up and down the stream in vain, began to give those prolonged and melancholy howls which indicate that they are on the trail, but in doubt ; for the hunted animal, after seeking dry land again, had betaken itself to its native stream a little farther up ; thus the hounds lost all trace, and ran hither and thither completely at fault.

Suddenly cries and baying resounded in another quarter ; the dogs had, most naturally, scented Julian’s hidden otter. In a moment his coat was torn out of the aperture in the old wall by one, his fish-basket by another, and, springing out, the terrified animal took at once to the water ; and all that passed now did so in less time than it will take us to recount it.

In the deepest part of the stream the distracted animal was seen to rise from time to time to breathe, and seemed to look round piteously for his master, who, in defiance of the shouts and curses of the indignant and perplexed huntsmen, strove to beat back the dogs, while again and again the round head and glossy skin of his pet were lost sight of as he dived deep down.

‘It is a King o’ the Otters!’ shouted Ringan Jannock, who was armed with a long stick.

By this time, despite the blows of Julian Melville, who freely laid about him, all the hounds had plunged beyond his reach into the few square yards of water which were now left to this new object of pursuit ; and there, amid the high excitement

of the on-lookers, they swam vigorously to and fro, encouraged by the shouts of the huntsmen, many of whom were gentlemen fond of all kinds of sport, but many more of whom were shepherds, gamekeepers, and labourers.

At last one hound more powerful than the rest seized the otter, and Julian's exclamations of rage were lost and blended in those of triumph that burst from the bystanders.

Tamed though it had been by his hand, the otter was resolved not to perish without an effort, and biting the hound by the muzzle, held on with the tenacity of a bull-dog ; but the odds against him were terrible.

The water of the pool was lashed and churned into bloody foam, and the dogs were all wedged in a mass around their victim, till, at a moment that served, the huntsman caught the otter by the tail, which was about sixteen inches long, and drew it from their midst and tossed it high into the air.

Falling, it never reached the ground, but fell on the upturned and reeking jaws of the soaked pack, in whose hungry stomachs every vestige of it vanished in a twinkling—every dog there, from the grandest old hound to the most snappish otter terrier, vying with each other in the work of destruction and mastication.

It was at this crisis that Julian Melville, while making futile efforts to rescue or revenge the poor animal, had the sudden fracas with Lord Hermitage, whose daringly uplifted hand and whip were arrested by old Colonel Kingsmuir, who said again and again, till the noble, as we have said, slunk back—' Hermitage ! Hermitage ! you forget yourself.'

A handsome man, and in his prime—for Lord Hermitage was not yet much beyond his fortieth year—he had the glazed *roué* eyes and the *blasé* bearing of a man who had led one of the fastest of fast lives ; his eyes were dark, and his complexion olive ; his thick moustache was prematurely grizzled ; his face was regular in its features, but stamped with lines that showed he had never restrained his evil passions or his fiery temper ; but now, under some secret influence, which puzzled Colonel Kingsmuir, he was regarding, with a confused, baffled, and perplexed expression, the flushed, haughty, and indignant young fellow he had menaced.

On the other hand, the brow of the latter smoothed, for the

eye of his antagonist had a strange, mysterious, and magnetic effect upon him. From what source this sprung he could not then define, but he felt his heart thrill and his flesh creep, yet he said haughtily, as he turned:

‘Allow me to remind you, sir, of the old copybook heading, “Good manners are no burthen, and civility costs nothing.”’

‘I am sorry, Julian, for all that has occurred,’ said Colonel Kingsmuir, shaking his hand, ‘but brawls are unseemly, amongst gentlemen especially, and here let the matter end. Will you accompany us down the river? We are sure of finding other otters below the salmon weir.’

‘No, Colonel, thanks,’ said Julian, looking at his watch, and hastily taking his rod to pieces; ‘my way lies in an opposite direction.’

And with a low bow to the courteous old officer, he took his way up the stream, to meet one whom Kingsmuir, perhaps, little suspected him of meeting; while the otter hunters, with their hounds, now flushed and eager for fresh prey, proceeded on their chase along the pastoral glen.

More than once did Lord Hermitage, with an inscrutable expression of eye, turn in his saddle and look after the lessening and retiring figure of Julian, till Ringan Jannock, with the cringing and favour-seeking bearing of the vulgar when addressing a man of superior rank, crept close to his stirrup, and said: ‘He is not worth your lordship’s consideration, and a good lash o’ your whip might have taught him to mind his ain affairs.’

‘And his name is Melville,’ said Hermitage, ponderingly, and heedless of the fellow’s remark.

‘Aye, my lord; he and his brother Gerard ca’ themselves Melville,’ continued Jannock, in a sneering tone; ‘but whether it be their legal name or no the de’il only can say—I say naught.’

‘Silence, fellow, and fall back,’ said Lord Hermitage haughtily, on which the peasant slunk away abashed.

Enraged and thoroughly ruffled by the whole affair, the outrage and affront put so publicly upon him, Julian felt that it would take all the sweetness and blandishments of her he had promised to meet to soothe the gust of passion that swelled within him. But to Colonel Kingsmuir he felt most

grateful for his intervention, as otherwise the fracas might have ended disastrously ; for had Lord Hermitage actually struck him, Julian, in the blindness and height of his fury, would infallibly have dashed him from his horse, and perhaps half killed him.

CHAPTER II.

HAPPY DAY-DREAMS.

HIS pet—a grotesque one, certainly—the tame otter, was dead, devoured before his eyes ; but of its fate he thought less than of the affront put upon him by Lord Hermitage, and as if he would leave his thoughts, with the scene of it, behind him, he strode up the glen till he began to near the dark woodlands amid which the quaint old manor house of Kingsmuir nestled under the brows of three great sheltering hills.

The steep conical roofs and vanes of its turrets (for it was an edifice built in the Scoto-French fashion of the days when Mary of Lorraine was Regent) could be seen peeping between the clumps of Scottish fir by which it was surrounded—the genuine old fir, that flourishes best among the mountains, where the dusky red of its gnarled trunk and the sombre hue of its foliage form a pleasing accompaniment to the solemnity of the crags and rocks, and where, unlike the species of fir called ‘Scotch’ in an evil hour by landscape gardeners, it often attains the height of a hundred feet.

When Julian came in sight of the stately old mansion, as seen at the end of a woody vista, where the dun deer nestled or browsed among the green waving fern ; when he saw in the background, on the hilly slope, its great home-farm, its fields in all the golden exuberance of an early harvest, falling fast beneath the scythes of the reapers ; the white bearded barley, the acres of ripened grasses, and meadows where the cattle browsed amid the rich clover, the green swelling hills dotted with thousands of white sheep that seemed like snow-flakes in the distance ; and when he thought of all Colonel Kingsmuir’s landed wealth, and wealth that came from many other sources, his high position in the county, and the aspirations in which he was entitled to indulge with regard to the settlement of his three handsome daughters in life, poor

Julian's heart died within him ; and he thought what madness it was in him, without name, or rank, or fortune, or even a profession, to yield to the love with which Kate, the eldest, and perhaps the most beautiful, had inspired him.

In the full flush of her girlish love, but little, perhaps, did Kate Kingsmuir consider, as yet, the eventualities of the future, though he had begun to do so now. The vast disparity in their fortune and circumstances could not fail to impress the more reflective Julian.

Of his father he had not the slightest recollection whatever ; his mother had died soon after giving birth to himself and his brother Gerard—leaving them as helpless and penniless orphans to the care and bounty of their maternal grandfather, old Captain Melville, of Fairy Knowe, a man with somewhat limited means, but a gentleman of high and spotless reputation, beloved by all who knew him ; and under his eye they had been reared and educated, till now close on the verge of manhood, without any means having been actively taken for their future and further advancement in life.

That there was a difference in the length of their respective purses had no effect on the friendly intercourse between Colonel Kingsmuir and the old Captain, after he came from a distance to settle in 'the Forest,' as they deemed themselves on a perfect equality and footing, as brother officers, as joint Justices of the Peace, and Commissioners of Supply for the County.

Their young people met on still greater terms of equality. Gerard Melville, a fair and handsome lad, with hair of golden brown and dark hazel eyes, like those of the swarthier Julian, was more of a student than the latter, whose hands were seldom without the gun, the fishing-rod, or the salmon-leister. When not with his books—and very mystical some of these were—or with his brother, to whom he was tenderly attached (for these two were so lonely in the world, having apparently neither kith nor kin therein, save the old Captain), he would spend hours by himself among the ruins of the district, such as Deuchar Tower or Yarrowside, Kirkhope or Thirlstane, peopling them in fancy with the men of other times ; or he would lie for hours on the broomy knolls, with his eyes fixed on fast-changing clouds, indulging in day-dreams, weaving out the

vague future ; and often, though none knew it then, communing in spirit with his dead mother ; for it was on his callow cheek, as the youngest of her twin-younglings, that her last lingering kiss was bestowed, ere she passed away from both for ever—save in the visions of the night.

Julian and Kate Kingsmuir had been companions as children, since the days when they had used the same skipping-rope, and set traps together to catch the robins and sparrows—the contrivance being formed by a slate, a piece of stick, a string, and a handful of crumbs in a tiny hole—a trap to be watched for hours in thrilling eagerness.

As years went on, they met, season after season, in their holiday times ; thus the boy and girl companions rapidly became boy and girl lovers. They never quarrelled, and Kate would gladly leave all her companions, and every manner of gaiety, to ramble with Julian on the grassy brae-sides, between the fragrant hedgerows, unknown to all but themselves, though their seniors would, no doubt, have laughed, as all old folks do, at the love of a boy and girl.

They had no secrets from each other ; he fished with her, read, sketched, and rode with her ; and it was for her that he shot a golden pheasant and procured its wing for her hat ; but the time was drawing near—as year by year it did—when they could no longer be deemed children.

Julian had climbed some of the highest crags in Ettrick, in the spirit of chivalry rather than boyish bravado, to obtain for her—though he sought it in vain—the eagle-stone, without the aid of which, superstition averred, no eaglets could be hatched in the nest.

A little secrecy became necessary in their interviews now, for the care of a watchful governess had to be circumvented ; yet unknown to her and to all their friends, save the studious Gerard, and Kate's particular friend and gossip, Amy Kerr of Kershope (for when in love a young girl must have a confidant), when season and time suited, they met at stated times, these two, often ostensibly to hunt for ferns where Julian alone knew rare specimens were to be found ; and often they watched together the sunset fading out in crimson lines of fire upon the peaks of wild Minchmoor or Ettrick Pen, till the shadows deepened in the grassy glens and the

heads of the mountains were wreathed in descending clouds.

Another year found them still more compelled to study appearances and the conventionalities of society, as, save to herself and the two just named, Julian was unknown to all as the lover of Kate Kingsmuir.

In this matter her friend Amy, a light-hearted and gay girl of her own age, was an unwilling ally, as her mind was filled with all the vast stores of Mudie's monthly box, and she wove all manner of brilliant romances out of Kate's love affair, while loving Julian too !

Would a time ever come when those bright day-dreams, those joyous and happy, happy hours of 'love's young dream,' were to be looked back to through a sad vista, and amid perils, sorrow, and suffering in a far-away land, as in winter we look back to the glories, the sunshine, and gladness of a departed summer—but a winter that no sweet summer was to follow? That, the future alone could unfold.

Filled already by the doubts to which we have referred, Julian surveyed with more of sadness than of envy the stately house and woodlands of Kingsmuir, which had been so named from having been a part of the primeval forest, cut down and cleared by order of King Alexander III., in the thirteenth century, because a Wood Demon was said to haunt it.

In the thick green hedgerows that bordered the chase a little white wicket opened, and the light, lithe figure of Kate Kingsmuir issued therefrom. She was dressed in white, trimmed with blue ribbon, and twirled on her shoulder a little white parasol lined with pink, perhaps to impart a tint to her fair and delicate face, which was of the pale order of beauty, pale and patrician ; her eyes were lustrous, dark, and gentle, and her hair, of rich—almost ruddy brown, was finely and firmly braided round her well-shaped head, under her smart hat, which was encircled by a single white ostrich feather.

There was a bright and loving expression in her face, and a lithe lightness in her step, as she hastened to meet her lover, though usually she had an indolent and careless grace of action peculiar to herself, and now a shy, tender smile

was hovering about her haughty little mouth, producing two dimples that certainly added to her girlish beauty ; but her face assumed an instant expression of inquiry as she detected, with all a woman's quickness of perception, the cloud that lowered on Julian's brow and dark thoughtful eyes.

'Thanks, love Kate—you are delightfully punctual,' said he, taking prisoner her willing little hand.

'I ever am, when not interrupted by someone or something—but, dear Julian, what is the matter?—tell me, Julian,' she added, for she loved to repeat his name—to her it savoured of passion and romance, and she always uttered it, even to herself, lingeringly and lovingly, and while pursing up her mouth into the most kissable of pink rosebuds.

He then in a few words told her of the otter hunt and the scene that had occurred near the old ruined cottage, a place that she knew well, for there the pink foxglove and the blue fairy-bells grew in great profusion. Her dark eyes sparkled as she listened, and her breast heaved.

'How dared Lord Hermitage insult you thus?' she exclaimed.

'I thank your good father for staying his hand. Had that whip touched me, by my mother's soul, Kate, I would have struck him down like a dog.'

'And he would have deserved it.'

'No man ever addressed me in such terms before, and in presence of a rabble of hinds too !'

'Do not look thus, dear Julian, and do not swear by the soul of any one, living or dead.'

'Why, Kate?'

'Because it sounds wicked, and your mother is dead, Julian. Where did she die?'

'Nearer the Border—before we came hither.'

'And your father died, my poor Julian, when you were quite young. Where did *he* die?'

'I do not know—somewhere abroad : it seems a painful subject to my good grandfather, so I never approach it,' replied Julian, crimsoning, in spite of himself, as he thought that there was some mystery in the family history ; 'but why these questions just now, darling?'

'Because Amy's mother—Mrs. Kerr of Kershope—was expressing some curiosity on the subject at dinner yesterday.'

‘Why?’ asked Julian, curtly.

‘I know not, dear—all that mattered nothing to her.’

‘Or to any one save me.’

‘Say *us*,’ urged the girl, with a tender and caressing smile.

‘Us, then, love Kate; but as for this Lord Hermitage—’

‘I shall scold him well to-night—though he is old enough to be my father.’

‘To-night?’

‘Yes—he is on a visit to us, and a young lady, you know, may say what she pleases.’

‘Especially, my own Kate, one so sweet and adorable as you are.’

‘I am so sorry that this affair occurred, Julian, for papa will not probably ask you or Gerard to Kingsmuir during the visit of Hermitage. He too is called Julian—so strange, is it not?’

‘Only a coincidence, Kate.’

‘But the name is not a common one, Julian, and I am so pleased that it is not so. You might have been called Thomas or John.’

‘Or Nebuchadnezzar—“the rose, by any other name,” you know the rest,’ said he, laughing, as he kissed her; ‘but will this nuisance of a fellow stay long at Kingsmuir?’

‘I think not; his father the Earl—old Lord Deloraine—is failing fast, and though the Lord Hermitage is neither the most dutiful of sons nor most unimpeachable of characters, as I heard Mrs. Kerr tell mamma, still family affairs require his presence at Deloraine, which, of course, you know, stands quite on the other side of Ettrick, and ever so many miles from here.’

‘I have barely ever heard of Lord Hermitage.’

‘He has been for years upon years abroad on diplomatic service, papa told me.’

‘Abroad—I wish he had remained there, and as far away as possible.’

Julian spoke unthinkingly; but ere long he was to have too much reason for the wish he expressed. After a pause, Kate said, while interlacing her white fingers on her lover’s arm, and casting down her long and almost black eyelashes:

‘Lord Hermitage is thought a very handsome man—at least, mamma says so—though of course a little wild.’

'A little wild !—he is an impudent brute !' said Julian, hotly.

'Now don't talk thus, Julian.'

'Wherefore, Kate?'

'Because you must know,' she replied, a little coquettishly, 'that he has developed suddenly—quite suddenly—a great admiration of me, and mamma quite teases me about it.'

There was an unintentional sting in the girl's playful remark. The countenance of Julian fell, and Kate perceived this instantly.

'I only jest, Julian dear—oh, you foolish boy ! think how old—quite old he is.'

'Only some forty years or so.'

'And he admires me ! I dare say he does ; is no one to have eyes for me but *you*, Julian ? But kiss me and tell me that you love me,' she added, clinging to his arm with all her might.

'Love you !—oh, who could fail to love you !' said Julian, with quivering lips, as he pressed her to his breast ; but started back as two horsemen with a groom were seen galloping down the road that wound through the glen.

'Here come papa and Lord Hermitage ! I would rather they did not see me here—with you, I mean,' said Kate, hurriedly.

'Then farewell, darling,' said Julian, opening the wicket ; 'you will meet me here again at the same hour to-morrow with the new photo you promised me, and, failing that, on the next.'

'I never fail you, Julian,' said the girl, as she lifted her sweet face affectionately and confidingly to her handsome lover, who kissed her again, once, twice,—perhaps thrice—and then she tripped laughingly away, while his eyes and his heart followed her. By this time the horsemen had disappeared, having made a detour round the park enclosures—'the policy,' as it is called in Scotland—to enter the avenue by the great gate, on the grey massive arch of which the dark green ivy and rich virginia-creepers were fast covering up and hiding the many quarterings in the antique stone scutcheons of the old line of Kingsmuir.

CHAPTER III.

THE CASTLE OF DELORAINE.

WHILE the imperious personage whom we have just introduced to the reader as the Lord Hermitage lingered at the house of Kingsmuir, his arrival and presence were impatiently awaited elsewhere, at the abode of his father, the Earl of Deloraine, who was now sinking fast of disease and years combined.

Situated in a sequestered part of the Forest of Ettrick, and adjoining in one place the lands of the House of Buccleuch, to which in ages past the Scotts of Deloraine owed feudal service, the castle of that name, one of the stateliest of its kind, looks down upon one of the many tributaries of the Tweed, from its perch on the summit of an isolated rock. The readers of Scott will readily recall the name, and how we are told, in the opening of the 'Lay of the Last Minstrel,' that when the Lady of Buccleuch required a trusty messenger to bring the Magic Book from Melrose :

'Then from amid the armed train
She called to her William of Deloraine :
A stark moss-trooping Scot was he,
As ere couched Border lance by knee ;
Through Solway sands and Tarras moss
Blindfold he knew the paths to cross ;
By wily turns and desperate bounds
Had baffled Lord Piercy's best bloodhounds.'

From whatever point it is approached, the stately bulk of the great Border keep absorbs the eye, as it towers above the narrow vale, the banks of which are fringed with luxuriant coppice. A great stone block of giant height, it is all built of squared and polished ashler, terminating in a machicolated and projecting battlement, furnished with tourelles at the angles, and conical roofs of grey slab, above which rise its vast square chimneys.

In ancient times it was surrounded by a barbican, and was entered by a doorway situated on the upper floor, by means of a movable bridge ; but in these our days of gas, steam and rural police, the former has been replaced by a stately terrace, and for the latter a handsome modern portal has been substituted on a level with the basement, and from thence a noble staircase ascends to the ancient hall, the height of which is so

vast, that it was said of old that a moss-trooper could stand in his stirrups and fail to reach the arched roof with his Scottish lance, six ells in length.

Every appliance that wealth and luxury can furnish in these our days had now replaced much, if not all the rude barbarism of such a dwelling, that was built for the old fighting times of feud and invasion. The loopholes for arrows or arquebuses still remain ; but the iron gratings of the windows have long since given place to plate glass, and in every way the abode was and is—if massive, grim, and baronial, like hundreds of similar dwellings that stud all the Scottish Borders—yet a magnificent one.

In past ages it had more than once been roughly handled by the English Lords Marchers ; by the Spaniards of Gamboa, and the German Reiters of Wolfenstein, in the wars of Henry VIII. ; and though last, not least, by the cannon of Old Noll, after the battle of Dunbar, as a battered portion of its southern wall still attests ; yet despite all that fashionable upholsterers had done internally, the old keep of Deloraine was still an epitome of the historic past.

In hall, corridor, and library were trophied coats of mail, old banners, and stags' horns ; and in some of the apartments that were but little used now, were hearths intended for wood fires alone, with andirons—heraldic wiverns and dragons—to support the logs ; with high-backed chairs, carved *prie-Dieux*, and quaint old cabinets ; and on every place where they could be borne, from the entrance door to the footmen's buttons, were the armorial ensigns of Deloraine, *or*, a bend azure, with a star between two crescents, and the motto *Amo*.

Old though the family, the title, of which they were so vain, was not ; but being ennobled in 1706, the year before the union of the crowns, the present Earl of Deloraine, who now sat lonely and querulously gazing into the embers of a huge fire that blazed in the great stone fire-place of the dining-hall, was fond of boasting that his ancestor was the last Scottish peer created by Anne in her capacity of Queen of Scotland alone. Even in these railway times some grim legends hover about the castle. It has, of course, a haunted room, or rather a hidden chamber, into which on certain nights of the year strangers or guests have been said to find their way, and there beheld terrible things, enough to turn their brains.

The most notable of these was the adventure of Willie of Kinninmont, and that ilk, who, in the early part of the last century, leaving the hall with more wine than he could comfortably carry, in search of his own room, tumbled somehow into another, when he suddenly found himself in the midst of Skeleton ball, in which the ghostly guests danced reels to the clanking of their own fleshless hands, and the clatter of their equally fleshless jaws.

Another source of many a grim legend is the Dule-tree of Deloraine, which had been in full foliage generations before the Kingsmuir had been made by axe and fire, and when old Ettrick Forest had been in all its umbrageous glory.

Age has hollowed its centre, and the strong branch from which many a contumacious vassal and many an English moss-trooper, taken red-handed, had been 'hung in his boots,' has long since fallen to the ground ; but the old King of the Forest still stands as in the days when these tragedies occurred before the castle gate, when the tiny fairies danced on the sward beneath it at night, and when an English banner waved on Selkirk towers, and Aymer de Valence, 'Proud Pembroke's haughty Earl,' kept watch and ward there with his archers and billmen, till the avenging Scots came sweeping through the Forest, led by the Lord of Castle Dangerous. But enough of archæology.

Lost in proud, angry, and regretful thought, the old Earl sat gazing into the fire, idling alone after a late luncheon. The cigar, which he held between the thin, white, and tremulous fingers of his right hand, had gone out ; his left toyed with a glass of choice old Madeira, which had been carefully iced for him by the butler ; his slippered feet rested on a velvet stool, and he lay back, almost at length, in his luxurious easy chair.

By his side were two aged and nearly blind staghounds asleep upon outspread deer skins.

Verging on his seventieth year, William, Earl of Deloraine, was a pale, thin, and very wasted looking man, yet aristocratic in face and bearing ; his aquiline nose and the square contour of his forehead suggested that he had been born to command ; the glitter that came at times into his proud, keen, and hawk-like eye, betokened intelligence, yet all his

life long, like his only son Hermitage, he had been the plaything of vice and the slave of his passions, till he had alike undermined his health and most seriously impaired his exchequer; and he found himself old and worn—old far beyond his years, and powerless to repair either.

His hope of clearing away the many encumbrances on his estate rested naturally on the chance of his son and heir contracting a wealthy marriage; but Hermitage for years past had been steeped in dissipation, and so drowned in debt that he had to become a species of exile, and on some so-called diplomatic service had been long abroad, and had doubtless contracted many entanglements, the nature of which the old *roué* Earl, from his own past experiences, could but too readily suspect.

Now that he had actually come back to Britain at last, and was only just past his fortieth year, the Earl began to hope that something might be done—though heiresses are not quite so plentiful as blackberries—to clear the debts off Deloraine, and, it might be, to have the name and title perpetuated; for the Earl's brothers and cousins had all died long since—a few honourably in action, but more of the family failing, dissipation.

Yet despite the knowledge and conviction that such a career is degrading, and that the peer who stains his nobility deserves to lose his coronet, the Earl was inordinately vain of his ancestral title and noble blood; and often, when writing to his son, reminded him that in contracting a marriage he must, if possible, do so with one of not less rank than his own.

“I can give you fiefs and privileges; but I cannot make you noble,” so said the Emperor Sigismund in reply to a plebeian who sought to be ennobled; and you must ever keep this in view before you, Julian,” said Deloraine in one of his shakily written letters; and well would it have been for father and son had they always kept the spirit of this before them in all their actions.

He drained his glass of Madeira, tossed his half-smoked cigar into the fire, and muttered to himself:

‘Kingsmuir, Kingsmuir! What is he doing, or why is the fool dawdling there? Kingsmuir has girls—attractive ones

too—I've seen worse ; I've seen worse,' he continued, as something of a *roulé* leer came into his old puckered eyes ; 'but Hermitage must have seen many better, so he can't mean matrimony in that quarter. If he did—if he did !'

Deloraine paused, and grasped the carved knobs of his arm-chair with his thin bony hands, and an angry gleam came to his withered face.

'But no—no ; did he marry all the three girls, their money would not clear half the mortgages over Deloraine,' he resumed, bitterly. 'Old—old ; no heir save Hermitage, and he not duly wedded yet. What the devil does he mean ? Years are coming on him ; is the fellow mad ?'

The Earl glanced at a portrait above the mantelpiece ; it represented Earl William of Queen Anne's time, in all his bravery as Colonel of the Scottish Horse Grenadier Guards, which he led at Blenheim and Ramillies.

'Yet I remember to have heard some strange rumours of a marriage or elopement with some girl,' resumed the Earl, conversing with himself, as the old who are much alone are apt to do ; 'to whom—to whom—bah ! She would be some worthless *intriguante*, doubtless, for no such person was with him at Vienna.' He then ground his false teeth, and almost laughed at the next idea. 'In the moat below that window there was drowned, yes, and buried too, in the days of James V., a woman whom an ancestor of ours degraded himself by marrying, and her spirit still haunts the place, say the vulgar, on stormy nights ; but, by Jove, we can't play such tricks now. I can but curse him—curse him, if he mars my plans ! ugh—ugh—ugh !'

And a violent fit of coughing nearly choked this amiable descendant of the 'stark moss-trooping Scot' who rode in his mail to Melrose ; but our next chapter may throw some light on the perplexities which beset him regarding some of the movements of his son and heir, and many of the old rumours concerning him.

CHAPTER IV.

AT FAIRY KNOWE.

FULL of love and implicit trust, and too young to feel aught of fear or jealousy, Julian Melville walked hopefully home-

ward, with his well-filled basket slung over his shoulder, and rehearsing, or conning over as he went, all that Kate Kingsmuir had said, while a smile of delight spread ever and anon over his face, as he thought of how charming she had looked with her pure complexion, her dark liquid eyes, and heavy masses of ruddy brown hair.

He disliked the Lord Hermitage, and would be glad to hear that he was out of the locality, as he devoutly wished never to meet him again; and he paused at times in his homeward way to look around him, for though Julian was of course familiar with his native scenery, its solemn grandeur never palled upon him. It was the autumn of the year.

Sinking westward now, the ruddy sun threw the dark shadows of the vast mountains far and deep across the silent glens, where by the wayside pools and sedgy fallows the groups of cattle lingered, and from whence no sound came but perhaps the rumble of a great cart laden from the corn-field, with a freight of noisy children on its summit; but that of which Julian was most sensible, was the mingled sweetness and solemnity of the mighty hills amid which lay his home, in the heart of the Southern Highlands.

Nestling in one of the gulleets or lesser glens amid the solitude, about a mile from the nearest village, stood the modest dwelling of the old soldier, his grandfather—Fairy Knowe, so called from the small wooded eminence it crowned. It was a two-storied cottage, or rather, an edifice consisting of one floor with dormer windows above, and the walls and roof of which were covered with interwoven masses of ivy and virginia-creeper.

In the garden before it the flowers were folding up their leaves now, and the bees, laden with the luscious spoil of distant meadows, were humming drowsily. Tall old elms towered in the background, and in these, all undisturbed, the dusky rooks had built their nests for years. Masses of shadow were beginning to creep all over the cottage and its locality, but the light of a blazing fire came cheerily forth from the dining-room, where Julian knew his old grandfather would be dozing in his well-worn arm-chair, or indulging in sad retrospection of the past—for his life had not been an unchequered one.

Here for some sixteen years had the old officer abode with his two grandsons, his only living relations, in perfect comfort, if not in luxury. His means were small, his interest less, and now he found them on the confines of manhood without a future distinctly defined for them, though both were well educated and accomplished ; but his highest hopes were of Gerard, who was studious, bookish, and thoughtful ; and even now, when Julian entered the room, his brother had a pile of literature littering the floor beside his chair, and in his hand a volume on which he was intent.

Opposite sat Captain Melville, a thin but hale man, between his sixtieth and seventieth year, intent on a newspaper—doubtless the *War Office Gazette*, to which he always turned first, as regularly as if he expected to see his own name appearing there again. He was perfectly bald, and the silver hair that lingered about his temples was as white as his now long, drooping, and untrimmed moustache.

He had regular aquiline features, dark eyes, that when he was animated glistened under his white eyebrows ; a carriage of the head and the general bearing of one who had been drilled and used to command ; yet he was gentle as a woman, guileless as a child, and of him we may say as Sterne wrote of his father, the old captain of Handyside's Foot, 'he was in temper rapid and hasty, but of a kindly sweet disposition, and so innocent in his own intentions that he suspected no one ; so that you might have cheated him ten times a day if nine had not been sufficient for your purpose.'

'Hollo, Julian,' said Gerard, looking up from his book, 'where is your tame otter?'

'Lost at last,' added the old gentleman, laughing ; 'I always thought your eccentric pet would give you the slip, and, by taking to its old element, leave pussy there alone,' and he pointed to the cosy cat that was winking on a hassock before the ruddy sea-coal fire.

Julian rather grimly handed his fish-basket to a servant, and almost ere she had withdrawn, in haste and anger related his encounter with the otter-hunters, and the fracas with the insolent Lord Hermitage, at the mention of whose name his grandfather started as if stung by a scorpion, while his sunken eyes sparkled with fire, and grasping with trem-

bling hands the arms of his chair, he sat very upright in it, and, as if he scarcely took in the sense of what Julian said, asked him to repeat it all over again, which—as indignation, like laughter, is often infectious—the lad did with growing anger.

‘Hermitage to raise his whip to you!’ exclaimed the Captain. ‘Has that infamous wretch come to the front again—come hither to cumber the peaceful country side?’

‘They have always been a bad lot, these Deloraines,’ said Gerard. ‘Is there not an old legend that tells us of a wild Lord of Deloraine who married a beautiful girl whom he met when hunting in Ettrick Forest, and that this girl’s mother was a witch, who had fed her on adders and serpents, like the damsel of whom we read in Aristotle’s *Secretum Secretorum*?’

‘Yes, and that some of her devilish nature has been said to appear at times in all the race,’ added his brother, mockingly.

‘Julian! Gerard! you know not what you say,’ said Captain Melville, with a little asperity or impatience in his tone; and then the old man remained for a long time with his reverend head bowed upon his breast, which seemed to heave as if each respiration was painful; and he appeared to Julian’s anxious eye to age—yea, to grow older, even as they looked upon him.

Making an effort, as if to rouse himself and emerge from a sea of thoughts that seemed to flow over him, wave after wave, the gaze of the old man wandered dreamily over some of his cherished household gods—the busts of Wellington and Nelson on the mantelpiece; above them his old regimental sword, crossed with one presented by the hand of his colonel, when the latter lay dying in the breach of an Indian fortress; some old battle pictures; his medals and epaulettes—those honourable badges of the past—under a glass shade; a picture of his dead daughter in her bright, happy girlhood: a stiffly grouped and nearly faded out photo of all the men of his company, taken when he bade adieu to the Royal Scots Fusiliers, every man of which would have died for him; then his eyes closed heavily, and he seemed on the verge of weeping.

His grandsons had often seen him deeply depressed, but never so much moved before.

'I am sorry, grandfather, that the circumstance of Lord Hermitage insulting me affects you thus,' said Julian, laying a hand on the old man's neck ; 'but twice my age though he is——'

'Aye, more than twice your age, my boy, by two years at least.'

'You know *his* age very exactly, grandfather.'

'I have fatal reason—too fatal reason, Julian. Well?'

'But for Colonel Kingsmuir I should have struck him down like a dog !'

'Thank God, my good friend prevented you.'

'What ! why should I not have done so, a lord though he be ? He bears my name of Julian too.'

'Nay, boy, nay, 'tis you who bear *his*.'

'I—I—how—why?'

'He is your father, boy.'

The brothers stood as if thunderstruck, and looked at each other, pale and trembling.

'*Our* father !' they exclaimed together, and incredulously.

'What madness is this ?' asked Julian.

'What mystery ? Oh, speak, grandfather !' implored Gerard.

'A shameful and a sorrowful secret kept till now,' groaned the proud yet gentle old man, as he wept ; and the tears of the aged are sad and harrowing to behold.

'Grandfather,' said Julian, after a pause, 'this terrible grief is too deep to be without full reason ; but whence our name of Melville?'

'You are the children of my daughter—not of a son ; I never had a son,' replied the old man, almost passionately, and with a hunted expression in his now flashing eyes. 'Could you bear the name of one who foully wronged her?'

The two young men grasped each other's hands instinctively, and looked at each other sadly and inquiringly, and then turned to the sorely stricken old man, who had buried his wrinkled face in his tremulous hands, and rocked himself to and fro ; while the bitter corroboration of many galling suspicions that had occurred to them in past years, but more especially of late, was in his words and bearing now.

Rage and shame filled their fiery, enthusiastic, and sensitive hearts at the terrible revelation now made for the first time ; and as their dead mother's pale face as they had last seen it in their childhood came before them, they continued to clutch each other's proffered hand, for stronger than ever seemed the bond of brotherhood between them now.

'Sooner or later, my dear, dear boys,' said Captain Melville, in a low and broken voice, 'I knew that I must tell you this. and who you really are, yet not the less my grandsons. My poor dear Gladys—the forsaken wife——'

'Wife ! was she wife indeed ?' asked Julian impetuously.

'Before heaven she was !' exclaimed the old man, with an uncontrollable burst of grief ; 'my Gladys was a very pigeon without gall ; in her love and gentleness unequalled ; uncomplaining in her sorrow ; yet whose sorrow was like unto hers, mingled as it was with unmerited shame and insult ! And at the hands of that man !'

'Who ?' asked Julian.

'Of whom have we been speaking but Hermitage, the son of Deloraine ?' asked Captain Melville passionately, as he raised his hands and eyes upward, invoking a malediction that was all the deeper for being voiceless and unuttered.

For some time Julian and Gerard, though full of natural curiosity and the keenest anxiety, and feeling their tongues, as it were, loaded with the questions they were dying to ask, remained silent and bewildered, while their grandfather remained also silent, absorbed in thought and grief. And so this unseemly fracas in the face of a multitude had been Julian's first meeting with his father ; and the proud old Captain, though humbled now to the very dust, sincerely hoped it might be the last ; and certainly Julian, though recalling that mysterious emotion which possessed him when they were face to face, had no desire for another.

Much was accounted for now, that to the brothers had before seemed unaccountable ! Julian now knew why his grandfather had ever parried his beseechings to get him a commission in the army, for until the names of his parents could be authoritatively given, in those pre-examination days, *his* name could not be put upon the list of the Commander-in-Chief for a nomination, either with or without purchase,

as the rule stood then ; and poor studious Gerard now knew the difficulties, monetary and otherwise, attendant upon his adoption of a civil profession ; and all their mother's grief, ending in a broken heart, the old man's present agony of mind and his bitter tears, the stigma, with those aching doubts and darkening clouds that overhung their future ; the whole complicated situation lay at that man's door, and yet they dared not curse him !

Yet Julian thanked God that Kingsmuir's intervention had stayed their hands in a brawl ! Of Deloraine, Julian in his bewilderment thought, dreamily, Could it be that his father was, and that he himself should be, the heir of that stately place—that vast baronial mansion, which he remembered to have once seen on a 'show day' ? He recalled the splendour of the abode, with all its gay modern and massive antique furniture, its moth-eaten tapestries and noble pictures—not the daubs of local academicians, but genuine Titians and Correggios, cabinet examples of Greuze and Verboekhoven, and stately Gainsboroughs ; the hall hung with fluted and inlaid *cap-à-pie* suits, including that of Scott's famous William of Deloraine ; the inlaid guns, pistols, daggers, and all that might catch a brave boy's ardent fancy, *ad infinitum* ; and alternately his heart was moved by a terrible pride and a more terrible sense of depression, sorrow, repining, and most unmerited shame ! Blood, and yet no blood ; so near, and yet so far ! It was all too dreadful to think upon.

'Grandfather,' said he, breaking the silence, and putting an arm affectionately round the old man, 'you said that our mother was the wife—the wife of this Lord Hermitage—before heaven.' Julian spoke with an effort, and then added, 'What do these words mean ?'

'Neither more nor less than truth, Julian.'

'Then why all this mystery ? why our adoption of your name ? why until this hour have we been kept in ignorance of what, perhaps, we had better never, never have known at all ? To what good end or useful purpose has it been ?'

And then Julian, as he thought of his bright Kate Kingsmuir, the idol of his young heart, groaned in very agony of spirit ; but after a pause his grandfather collected his thoughts,

and imparted to him and Gerard the story of their mother's wrong, the narrative of which requires at least a chapter to itself.

CHAPTER V.

GLADYS MELVILLE.

CAPTAIN GERARD MELVILLE was in bearing and aspect a courtly veteran officer of the old school of ideas, but a man disappointed in the service, who had ruined his own prospects of advancement by retiring before his time, to secure for his delicate wife the health which she could never have enjoyed while 'knocking about' in various climates with a regiment ; so, with a moderate income and his pay, he had, as he said, 'pitched his tent' near a pretty hamlet in the pastoral and fertile Rhinns of Galloway, as that peninsula which lies south-west of Luce Bay and Lochryan is named ; but all his love, care, and assiduity failed to restore or to save her.

She died early, leaving him with one child, a daughter, named Gladys after herself, who, as she grew to girlhood, became the pride of the old man's soul and the centre of his existence ; and he was never weary of tracing her mother's delicate beauty, her charming little ways and winning tricks of manner, in their bright-haired Gladys as she matured in years.

She grew to girlhood, rare in the fairness of her beauty, full of grace and affection ; and he spared nothing to have her highly accomplished in all that the best tutors and governesses could give her ; and by her eighteenth year, Gladys Melville, who might have been the acknowledged belle of a great circle, was the object of profound admiration in the rural district where she resided, and where, as many averred, she was lost to the world.

But amid the pastoral Rhinns of Galloway the Captain had made his home ; her mother lay in the secluded burial-ground of the adjacent hamlet, and he was loth to leave the place for a gayer and more populous neighbourhood, a circumstance which he was yet sorely to repent.

Secluded though her life, and dull her existence, birds, flowers, books, or music occupying by turns the most of

her time and attention, Gladys Melville had heard of lovers, had read of them, and had her day-dreams of them, as what young girl has not?

Romances and novels, as well as her own enthusiastic imagination, had often suggested to her the joy of being loved by some one—of being addressed in tones and terms of affection and admiration by one her equal, or, it might be, her superior—the handsome young man of whom she found the prototype in every three volumes of fiction that came in her way. The days of wandering knights, disguised princes, and winning fairies, were past and gone, like those of chivalry; but romance and love will exist for ever, and the mind of the lonely and lovely Gladys was full of both, and the time was drawing nigh which she was never to forget.

Seated one forenoon in the little garden that surrounded their home, she was intent on some recent novel—yet not so much so, that she looked from time to time upward to the summit of the bold mass, where the Mull of Galloway ends in an ever-raging sea—when a number of huntsmen swept past at full speed, and vanished, dogs and all, like so many evil spirits, over the brow of an adjacent eminence, when the shouting, barking, and cracking of whips passed away in the distance, and Gladys again sank into reverie, and letting her book drop, rested her dimpled cheek on the palm of a little white hand that was hidden amid the silken masses of her rich bright hair.

Of what was she thinking?

‘Perchance of a young girl’s dreaming
On words like “mother” and “wife,”
A child-soul’s innocent scheming,
To make out the riddle of life,’

when suddenly a cry escaped her, as a horseman, the last of the field evidently, leaped a hedge close by. For a moment, she saw man and horse, as it were, in the air; then there was a crash as both came down together in a flower-bed close by her, and the huntsman seemed to lie, like a heap, in red and buckskin, as one who was dead, under the legs of his panting horse, the bridle reins of which were still grasped in his hand.

The crash and her cry brought forth her father, Captain

Melville, her old nurse, Mysie, and all their little household, in terror and dismay. The sufferer was assisted to his feet, and gazed about him for a few minutes with a dazed and bewildered expression of eye.

‘Just come a cropper!’ said he faintly, in reply to their mingled expressions of sympathy. His bridle hand hung nearly powerless by his side, and, by the way he limped, it was evident that one of his ankles was a little injured. ‘Thank heaven, there are no bones broken,’ he added, with a faint smile, as the reins of his horse were taken by an old soldier who acted as the Captain’s valet, gardener, and factotum, who led the animal away towards the stable, where Gladys’ pad was stalled, while Captain Melville proffered to the huntsman his arm, and Mysie hastened to procure him brandy-and-water. ‘Thanks, sir—a thousand thanks, and to your good people,’ said the stranger, lifting his hunting-cap; ‘and I have to apologise to this young lady for alarming her so—but somehow I missed my way, and rushed my horse at the wrong hedge.’

This was chiefly addressed to Gladys, who bowed with a sweet, alluring smile, such as might have lighted up the face of Dante’s Beatrice, while

‘Her fresh and innocent eyes
Had such a star of meaning in their blue,’

that the stranger could not fail to be attracted by them, and into his handsome but sinister eyes there stole a bright expression as he, though she knew it not, recognised her at once, and he said :

‘I think I have the honour of addressing Miss Melville.’

‘And this is my papa,’ replied Gladys, colouring with surprise; ‘but where have we met before?’

‘I have had the pleasure of seeing you at church—allow me to introduce myself—Captain Scott—Julian Scott.’

‘As a brother officer, you are most welcome,’ said the old Captain, proffering his hand; ‘permit me to lead you indoors, Your friends of the field—’

‘Oh—they won’t miss me; most of them are at St. Mary’s Isle by this time, and my quarters are at the village inn, where my horses and grooms are, and there I shall send a message on the morrow.’

So, for that night at least, the stranger who had so suddenly fallen among them became the guest of the little household at the cottage among the Rhinns. The Captain had no Army Lists, save some that were very antiquated, so he could not have verified the statements of his visitor, even had he doubted him, which he certainly did not ; but with soldierly instinct he asked, 'What regiment ?—the Scots Fusiliers was mine.'

'Oh—the Household Brigade,' was the evasive reply.

'By your name, a relation of the Deloraine family, I presume ?'

'Yes.'

He was a very near relation indeed ; but it did not suit him then to say so. Ever accustomed to deceit and dissimulation, he saw how rare was the loveliness and extreme the simplicity of Gladys, and resolved, prompted by the whole situation, to maintain a species of incognito.

His features were fine and regular ; his dark eyes, full, though heavily lidded, were long-lashed, and to the fancy of Gladys they looked dreamy and loving ; others had the conviction that, though handsome eyes, they were at times cunning and voluptuous in expression. A heavy, dark moustache concealed an upper lip that indicated cruelty, and a lower one that in its fulness indicated sensuality : yet his face and figure were both attractive, and he had a high-bred and courtly air, with a dash of *insouciance* in it that made him altogether unlike in style any of the men whom Gladys had been wont to see in her secluded home amid the Rhinns of Galloway ; and long after all had retired to rest, she lay with her sweet face on her pillow thinking, thinking, and thinking over the whole adventure—how interesting he had looked, and of all the pretty nothings he had so pleasantly and yet so impressively addressed to her.

A stranger, a gentleman ; more than all, a soldier, thrown thus helplessly on the care and compassion of this little household, invested him with much new and tender interest, and thus Captain Melville and his daughter applied themselves sedulously to the care of one who thought little of how much trouble he gave any one, provided he excited attention and was surrounded by comfort ; and though life in the Guards was very different from what the old Captain had found it in

the 'Fighting Twenty-first,' yet he quite won the heart of the latter by his *bonhomie*, and by the free-masonry and small-talk, or 'shop,' peculiar to all who indulge in pipe-clay and gunpowder.

Though unable to ride or take his departure, the invalid appeared at the breakfast-table next morning in his hunting-dress (till 'his man could send over some of his things from the inn'), where Gladys, bright as Hebe in her girlish beauty, arrayed in simple muslin, presided over the repast, and he saw with pleasure the lady like grace with which her white little hands wandered among the old dragon china cups and saucers, while her father discussed the siege of some hill-fort and a grouse-pie together ; but the moment the repast was over, he took his seat in the recess of a bay window where Gladys was sorting her wools, and began in low and earnest tones to praise the beauty of the scenery.

The morning was beautiful. He had 'slept like a top overnight,' he said, and 'was now, "like a giant refreshed,"—though a sorely bruised one'—and felt full of new joy as he looked, with her, on the attractive loveliness of the autumn landscape, where the gilded summits of the green hills of Galloway stood up so clearly against the deep blue of the sky, and where the silver mist, white as carded wool, was rolling before the morning wind through the deep pastoral glens that lay between.

And in the more immediate foreground were the coppices, where the varied tints of the season were in all their glory, though it was a fast-fading one, and where the short-horned and fiery-eyed cattle were browsing peacefully, with, in some places, the fallow deer sharing their repast.

All that he said on these, to Gladys, familiar features in her native landscape seemed to invest them with new interest, and so the pretty slippers she was making for her father, then immersed in his morning paper, made but small progress ; but ere long, in a lower vein, he began to speak of other things than the scenery ; and all unused to the language of adulation, Gladys blushed with simple pleasure and alarm at some of his compliments, real or implied, while he bent over her and studied every varying expression of her face, with the eye of a connoisseur and adept in the art of flirtation. So the hours stole pleasantly on.

Attracted by the girl's freshness of heart, purity of spirit, and wonderful beauty, and finding himself fast becoming an object of interest to her far beyond what Gladys would have dared to admit even to herself, this sly but undoubtedly good-looking young fellow—for he was only some three or four and twenty, if so much—was resolved to make the most of the situation by making the very worst of his bruises, and yet he would not permit the village Esculapius to be sent for.

Had his sole attendant or companion been the old nurse Mysie, with her wrinkled front, he would have found some means of being 'off like a bird' without delay. As it was, he remained, when pressed to do so, and several days passed on, pleasantly for him, but most perilously for poor Gladys.

'I have not heard much good music of late—play me, sing me something, please,' he would urge in the evenings as he opened the girl's piano.

'How do you know I do either?' she asked him on the first of these occasions.

'What an odd question, Miss Melville! All young ladies do both, though not so well as, I am assured, you can do.'

And as Gladys seated herself at the piano, the old Captain, seated in his elbow chair, and in his favourite position, rubbed his hands approvingly, to hear that his 'dear girl' was appreciated duly, and prepared to beat time with his fingers to whatever she performed.

Despite all he had heard elsewhere, Julian Scott was certainly enraptured with her execution. Moving, as he was wont to do, in the most polished circles of London life, he was familiar with everything that had either merit or novelty, yet the thrilling voice and tender utterances of Gladys Melville seemed somehow—whether it was conviction or heated fancy he knew not—to exceed all that he had heard before, and to be the language of the soul, for the girl had fine taste and was well educated, yet she never attempted any of those musical flights which he might have termed 'fireworks'; but when, thinking to please him, she adopted a humbler style of art, and sung some sweet old Galloway song, such as 'Bonnie Lady Anne,' she was grieved to find that she failed to do so, and made such attempts no more.

Though the son and heir of a Scottish noble, he was too

blasé, too anti-national, to care much for such airs. In his secret heart he deemed them 'doooid slow twaddle,' and was glad when she resumed some of the more familiar melodies from the operas; and everything Scottish, and Irish too, he deemed 'vulgar and stoopid,' though he took care not to say so to her.

And so when the gloamings came, and they were sitting together, the music forgotten, they would fall into low-voiced talk, and had confidences that were more than friendly, while Captain Melville, after his post-prandial cigar and glass of grog, had fallen asleep with the daily paper on his knee; and at times they wandered into the garden, where Julian had 'come the cropper,' and, assisted by a staff and *her* arm—a support most necessary—they could watch the daylight declining on Clanyard Fell, and the thin haze creeping up from Chapelrossan Bay, like a curtain of filmy crape, while the last red ray of the set sun faded out on the old spire of the village church and the lonely summit of the lofty Fell.

Then a solemn hush would seem to fall upon the darkling hills and bordering sea, and all its caverned coast, when not even the voice of a bird came floating through the air, and when there seemed to be a pause in all nature; and yet at such times Gladys found her overcharged heart beating most wildly and rapidly, for in addition to the assistance of her soft and taper arm, the strong white muscular hand of Julian Scott was somehow clasping her fairy fingers, as if seeking additional support therefrom.

CHAPTER VI.

AMONG THE RHINNS OF GALLOWAY.

'GLADYS,' said Julian Scott, when the time was drawing near that rendered his departure necessary, 'of course you love this place—all sequestered though it be?'

'Yes—I love it,' she replied.

'Dearly?'

'Of course; why should I not? It is home—papa's home—I have known no other.'

'Poor child!' said he, laughing.

'Is there no place on earth where *you* have centred your affections?' she asked softly.

‘No—not as yet.’

‘How so?’

‘I am somewhat cosmopolitan, and when not in London, am always most at home in Naples or Vienna—much more so certainly than amid the hills and woods of my native Borderland. Will you be content to live here always?’ he asked, caressing the pretty hand that lay confidently in his.

‘I think I shall—why not? It is the home of papa.’

‘And to marry here?’

‘Why not?’ said she, while her cheeks flushed and her eyelids drooped.

‘There is no one here in this wilderness, surely, whom you can ever love?’

‘But some one may love me,’ she replied coyly and rather reproachfully.

‘That I doubt not—many; all who know you, Gladys; but would you marry where you—you cannot—’

‘What, Captain Scott?’

‘Love?’ he added, in a low voice, with his moustache all but touching her lovely little ear.

‘No—I should hope not; but why—how have we got on *this* theme?’

‘Is it not a most natural one?’

‘I don’t know,’ she replied, with half-averted face.

‘Natural, when one is with you.’

‘Oh, Captain Scott, let us speak of something else, pray.’

But Captain Scott recurred to the theme again and again, and but too successfully. Poor fluttering Gladys! she was fast learning from his well-practised lips a new joy that seemed to herself most strange—the realisation of many a lonely day-dream; that she was beloved at last, and that she returned that love to the full! And the declaration of his passion soon came to pass in this manner.

‘I leave this to-morrow, Gladys,’ said he.

‘You look neither well nor strong.’

‘I shall stay one day more, if you will permit me. I am ill, indeed; but my illness is that of the mind.’

The large eyes of Gladys regarded him tenderly and inquiringly, while her heart thrilled.

‘I am very miserable,’ said he, in a low voice, ‘for I have

broken the laws of hospitality and those of gratitude, in daring to love you, Gladys, without the permission of your father, and situated as I am—with my own family—I dared not ask it. The moment I leave you, Gladys, I go forth to misery, and to the hopeless task of trying to forget you—to forget you amid irksome duties and the frivolities of the world.'

His voice, so sweetly and perilously modulated, actually trembled, and tears stood in his eyes, for this man could actually act to himself, as well as to others.

'Julian!' exclaimed the girl, as her eyes also filled with tears, and he clasped her to his heart passionately and convulsively, and in broken accents told all his specious tale, but too artfully and too well.

'But to what end is all this?' said he, in broken accents. 'You know not my family! They will never consent to my marriage with a penniless girl—at least, with one who is not an heiress. Your father, proud and honourable, will never consent to a private marriage, even with the heir of a throne. What then can we do, unless we abandon ourselves to despair, but take our own course; our fate is in our own hands.'

'Julian, I do not understand you,' sobbed Gladys.

'Let us fly together, my beloved, and once we are married they cannot help themselves but give us their blessing, and all will "come right in the glazing," as the artist fellows say.'

This was scarcely the tone to adopt; but Gladys did not think of that. Love—a love that was new and irresistible—triumphed over the instincts of reason and filial regard, and though tears and silence were the only answers she could give, Julian Scott at once adopted them as an assent, and in accents of ardour and joy poured forth his profession of thanks, love, and adoration.

'Suppose,' said he, after a long pause, filled up by sighs and soft murmurs alone, as he drew her close to him and their trembling lips met lingeringly; 'suppose that you should in time come to discover that I am not worthy of you—not half so good as you deem me——'

'Julian!'

'That, in fact, I am a very bad fellow?'

'Oh, Julian, surely that could never be!'

'Well, Gladys, but what then?'

'Still I shall love you, Julian—my own Julian.'

But a time was to come when these strange questions, so suggestive of doubt, were to be recalled, sadly and wonderingly indeed, when seas were rolling between Gladys Melville and the peaceful Rhinns of Galloway. She consented to all his plans for a secret marriage, praying in her heart that her father would forgive her; but never doubting that he must do so, she abandoned herself to think of the joyous future; for *he* had come at last—this ideal of hers—the lover so long mentally pictured, and oh, how handsome and seductive he was! And what were his thoughts when he found himself alone? They were something in this fashion:

'She wants style; but she has that which is a thousand times better—the perfection of ladylike grace. In her ideas of the world and of life, as our set know them, she wouldn't take rank in Tyburnia or Belgravia; but, by Jove, I've seen there and elsewhere a thousand women who couldn't hold a candle to her for genuine beauty! As a wife, any man might be proud of her; but, bah! people don't marry nowadays. Life can be jolly enough without the trammels of matrimony. Wonder if this little girl will ever be taught to think so! Julian, my boy, you've entered stakes for a nice thing here?' Ponderingly he proceeded to make up a cigarette, and added, 'Frank, free, and utterly devoid of fashionable or modern young ladyism, she'll do—she'll do!'

But there was one in the Melville household who, though she could never have suspected the plot in progress now against the peace of all there, had her own views of Captain Julian Scott, and this was old nurse Mysie, who had been to Gladys as a second mother since her own died.

'Well, nursie darling, now that you have seen more of Captain Scott, what do you think of him?' asked Gladys, in a dreamy and coaxing way.

'Think?' said the old woman with knitted brow.

• 'Yes, yes.'

'I don't know what to think, dearie.'

'Surely you have seen enough of him,' urged Gladys.

'Ay, ay, quite enough, perhaps.'

'And must have come to some conclusion about him?'

'Conclusion?'

'Well, opinion, then?' said Gladys, becoming quite impatient.

'Of course I have, bairn,' was the dogged response.

'Then am I to conclude that it is unfavourable, as you are so cautiously reluctant to express it.'

'I care not how you may like my words,' said the old woman, now fairly driven into a corner, 'but remember they are the words of one who has been as a mother to you since your own passed away; yet this I must say, Gladys, that he is not what he seems; and there is something about him—in his eyes especially—which I do not like.'

'Oh!' exclaimed Gladys, 'think of how nicely, how sweetly he speaks.'

'So did the serpent in Eden.'

'Nurse Mysie, you are intolerably suspicious!'

'I have seen more of the world than you, bairn.'

'So has papa, who is his friend.'

'Be it so; but he is no friend to your good papa, who is as simple as a child, and so good himself that he believes all other men to be so; and now you have my thoughts, bairn.'

'Oh, you dear stupid old thing,' exclaimed Gladys, kissing and caressing the old woman, who loved her tenderly.

'Surely you must admit that his eyes are lovely?'

'They are not.'

'This is a terrible prejudice.'

'It is *not*, and I shall thank heaven when we have seen the last of him.'

Then a coy, covert, dreamy smile spread over the girl's face as she thought in her heart, 'Oh, nurse Mysie, when you have seen the last of him—my Julian—you will have seen the last of *me*!'

'And so you leave to-morrow, Captain Scott?' said his old host, as they lingered over a magnum of his best claret, which had been brought forth in honour of the man he addressed, and which he had carefully aired with his own hands.

'To-morrow, my good old friend.'

'Welcome the coming—speed the parting guest,' said his host, laughing; 'and I hope soon again to welcome your coming, but not with a cropper among my flower-beds.'

An inscrutable smile twinkled in the eyes of Julian Scott, and a furtive yet sad glance of fond love in those of Gladys, as they wandered from his face to the thoughtful one of her doting and unsuspecting father. At that moment she felt a conspirator against his peace, and a passionate glow of remorse burned in her heart ; but she had given her promise, and in a little time all would be well.

At last there came that morning which the poor old Captain was doomed never to forget, when Julian Scott, in departing overnight, had taken with him Gladys, the one ewe lamb of the fold ! It was hard to bear—hard to bear ! As one in a dream he and the old nurse clung to each other, and surveyed in stony wonder the bed unslept in, the pillow unpressed, the letter of farewell and imploring pardon that lay upon it, and they strove to realise the apparently impossible conviction that she was gone—gone—gone—but whither ? She had been, he thought, wonderfully and unusually tender and pathetic with him overnight ; and she could be thus, with this vile scheme in her heart—thus to her lonely, lonely, loving father !

Deep were the groans of anguish that came from his breast, and bitter were the tears that coursed over his now whitened cheeks, that had never blanched when the roar of battle thundered in his ears. The longing to be up and doing ere it was too late—up and doing what?—and of hurrying somewhere, grew strong in his heart ; but he had no clue, and sat with his face buried in his hands, on the table where the untasted breakfast lay, abandoned to bewilderment and grief. Her birds beat their callow breasts against their cages for her in vain that fatal morning ; her flowers drooped in the sun ; her favourite pony had his nose over the half-door of the stable, whinneying for the morning apple which he was wont to receive from her white caressing hand ; her pet dog, Gyp, missed her soon, and looked up wistfully at the forsaken man, who sat with his face in his hands, and over whom nurse Mysie hung in silent misery. Neither she, nor any friend to whom he applied in his despair, could track the fugitives. Julian Scott had, some days before, sent off his grooms and horses from the village inn, and no

persons answering to the description of him and Miss Melville had passed either north or south by the nearest railway station—for a very sufficient reason : they had proceeded from one at a distance, where none knew or remarked them. As Gerard Melville in his loneliness now thought over the brevity of the acquaintance which had brought about an issue so fatal, so sudden, and altogether so uncalculated on, he bitterly reproached himself with his own want of fatherly care and foresight ; and bitterly too was he reproached, in no measured terms, by old Mysie—yet who could have dreamed that all this horror and dismay would have come to pass ? And he cursed, as only the deeply wronged and desolate can curse, the robber who stole his child !

CHAPTER VII.

THE SECRET MARRIAGE.

UNUSED to the ways of the world, ignorant of the double or artificial lives led by so many, altogether natural, innocent, and pure, it had seemed to the young girl wholly unnatural, cruel, and most mysteriously unnecessary to have to act, in the presence of others, the part of indifference towards the man she loved, and who, she knew, loved her passionately. Passionately ? If he did so, why all this acting ? she thought. But then there was, as he had told her, his dreadful father, on whom his whole dependence lay. From this acting they were now both free ; but how long was this new life of duplicity towards her father and to his to last ? It would have seemed horrible to long for the death of the latter, and, indeed, no such idea ever occurred to her.

Truly and vividly her heart foreboded and her imagination pictured the scene of woe and consternation she had left behind, and the appearance of her father, after having read to Mysie the incoherent words of her farewell letter, through welling tears, folding it up, only to open it again with trembling hands, and ask of heaven and himself, could such things be ? Who would preside at his table now ? pour out his tea or coffee, butter his toast, select the tit-bits for him ?—and now, oh ! more than all, there would be no one to say ‘ Good-morning, papa,’ and to kiss the dear old face. Her soul shrunk, her heart was wrung within with yearning and

reproach, which even the tenderest caresses of Julian failed to stifle ; but it was all too late now, and the monotonously clanking swift train sped on, and on, and on, she scarcely knew whither. What places were those past which it flew ? The richly-wooded vale of the Cree ; the Carlinwark and the giant tower of Threave beside the rolling Dee ; Dalbeattie with its brawling burn and red granite cottages ; and ere-long she saw the morning sun shining on the broad, fair bosom of the noble Nith, expanding to an estuary as it swept seaward under a vast and ancient bridge, deemed in the middle ages the rival, if not the superior, of that of London, and she found herself in their first halting-place, the old and busy market-town of Dumfries—in structure and situation one of the most beautiful in the south of Scotland ; and gladly did Gladys welcome the shelter and rest of the nearest hotel, where she strove to collect her thoughts to face the next part of the startling programme she had begun—their marriage, which was to be, of course, a private one.

‘Can we not be married in church, Julian ?’ she asked.

‘In church ! Surely you know that is not the custom in Scotland ?’

‘I forgot,’ said the girl, wearily and faintly, ‘for my mind is heavy with trouble—heavy with the consciousness that I have done a great wrong.’

‘My darling, we have surely had enough of this sort of thing !’ urged Julian.

‘Pardon me, dearest ; but we must have a clergyman at least ?’

‘Quite unnecessary,’ said he, with something of irritation in his tone.

Full of shame, sorrow, and remorse, all struggling with her blind and passionate love, poor Gladys had only one craving—to get the marriage ceremony over, and return at once to ‘dear papa,’ to console him in his alarm, obtain his forgiveness and blessing. Julian Scott thought all this very peculiar ‘bosh,’ and was very nearly saying so ; but the necessity for having ‘something done’ in the way of a matrimonial ceremony—he scarcely knew or cared what, so that it dried her tears, restored her smiles, and reassured her—he felt to be imperative now, only that the ‘noose’ was not to be too

tightly drawn. While thinking this over, through the medium of a long beaker of brandy and soda, worried and well-nigh irritated by the remorse of Gladys for abandoning her father—an emotion for which he had not the slightest sympathy—to console her, as he conceived, he said : ‘I have not yet told you all the truth, as to *who* I am.’

‘Who are you?’ she asked, with a startled expression.

‘I am the Lord Hermitage.’

‘And *not* Julian Scott?’

‘Yes, little goose, I am Julian Scott, Lord Hermitage, and son of the Earl of Deloraine. Hence the secrecy so necessary—you understand——’

‘And shall I be a countess!’ exclaimed Gladys, again rushing into his arms as a new joy expanded in her breast, as she thought of her father’s pride and emotion.

‘Of course, when the old boy quits this sublunary sphere ; but, meantime, we must not make too much bother about our marriage—it must be kept very quiet,’ he added for the twentieth time, as he gave her his arm, and they issued into the sunshiny streets of the ancient town ; ‘it must be what they call in England a Scotch one ; and he *re* is a fellow who, I suppose, can do it,’ he added, pausing before a door on the brass plate of which was inscribed :

‘MR. URIAH GRIPPIE,
SOLICITOR.’

‘I don’t like having anything to do with lawyers ; but *here* goes, darling. (He is not a clerico, thank goodness,’ thought his lordship ; ‘that might be too serious even for me !) And now to see the inside of this old beggar’s legal chamber of torture, as I doubt not it has been, and will be to many, till the devil gets his own.’

‘Julian!’ said Gladys, imploringly, as she clung to his arm, and felt his tone jar upon her feelings at such a time ; and singular it was that though he had some cunning or superstitious scruple about appearing before a clergyman in the capacity of a bridegroom, he had, in his supreme ignorance of the whole situation, none whatever in doing so before a lawyer or anyone else, conceiving perhaps that verbal declarations alone were necessary.

Mr. Uriah Grippie was 'at home,' and Gladys felt her heart palpitating painfully, and her cheeks blushing scarlet beneath her veil, as they were ushered into the private office of the lawyer, a somewhat gloomy chamber, of depressing aspect. Numerous tin boxes marked with the names of clients and estates lined two sides of the room; some fly-blown maps decorated the wall elsewhere, and its narrow windows opened to a gloomy alley of ancient houses all built of dark-coloured stone, and coeval, it might be, with the days of Flodden. From a table, ink-bespattered and littered with dockets of letters and parchments tied with red tape, Mr. Uriah Grippie rose to receive his visitors—clients, of course, he deemed them—and hastened to give them chairs, for it was not often, certainly, that a man of an air so distinguished as Julian Scott (whom we must now call Lord Hermitage), or that a girl of such grace and bearing as Gladys Melville, appeared before him. She, of course, was voiceless; but the former, with perfect coolness, informed the lawyer of the object they had in view, and as he listened, his low brow at first was knitted, then it gradually smoothed, while a smile puckered up his cruel mouth and twinkled in his pale fishy eyes, of which nothing in all Scotland could equal the low cunning of their expression, destitute as they were of either eyebrow or lash, as he detected at once a case which, if handled with care, might eventually become a most lucrative serpentine coil. As usual with his profession in Scotland, he was entirely dressed in black, and wore the white necktie which is there supposed to impart an air of respectability, even piety, to the wearer. His age was past forty; his figure and bearing were vulgar; his face mean, and there was much in its wrinkles and the expression of his cold and restless eyes that seemed to tell of chicanery, cunning, and cruelty, in spite of the bland deportment he strove to cultivate.

'We don't want any fuss—any newspaper notices, paragraphs, and all that sort of thing,' said the bridegroom elect.

'My dear sir——' began Mr. Grippie, in a fawning tone.

'Won't do in our case; one must study one's family—monetary interests—an uncompromising parent, and so forth.'

Mr. Grippie spread a sheet of paper before him, made a margin thereon by mere force of legal habit, and dipping a pen

in his inkhorn, recorded the names of Gladys and her father, which she had to repeat three times in trembling accents ere they were understood.

'You are aware, madam, that a good deal of twaddle has been written and said in England about Scotch marriages,' said Mr. Grippie; 'but, by my faith, you can be tied fast enough,' he added, with some point, to Julian.

'So fast, and yet so loosely,' replied the latter, laughing, 'that I have heard it said that in Scotland a man never knows when he is married and when he is *not*.'

'Don't you have that in your mind,' said the lawyer, bending his hairless brows; 'you call yourself simply Julian Scott?'

'It is my name.'

'But your title?'

'Title—I have none.'

Gladys looked up with alarm at this blunt statement.

'My Lord Hermitage,' said the lawyer, with a quiet chuckle, 'do you say this to me, who am a Justice of the Peace for this county, and know you well—too well, perhaps? Take care, my lord,' he whispered, 'you are playing a dangerous game.'

'A pleasant one, anyway, Mr. Grippie.'

'A dangerous game, I say, as you may discover ere long.'

'All right; I'll be ready for settling day, as we say on the turf, old fellow,' replied Lord Hermitage, as he laid a fifty-pound note before the lawyer, knowing well the best way of removing any scruples *he* might have. Mr. Grippie glanced at it affectionately. The Earl of Deloraine might give him far more for refusing to have aught to do with the matter; but he knew not where that noble was, and there was no time for communicating with him. So, to be brief, he summoned a couple of his clerks from an adjoining room, and, much to their astonishment, went through the questions and answers necessary to constitute the couple before him 'man and wife.'

All these were duly engrossed, signed, and witnessed; but Mr. Uriah Grippie, while with great apparent kindness and prudence handing the marriage certificate to the half-sinking Gladys, kept a duly signed *duplicate* thereof in his own possession.

So rapidly and skilfully did he achieve this, that neither she nor her husband were aware of what they were doing, when

asked to sign their names *twice*. He then squeezed the shrinking bride's hand with his damp, fishy, long, lean fingers till she shuddered, he laughing the while, as much as it was in his nature to laugh, as he congratulated her by name as 'Lady Hermitage,' but not until his two clerks had withdrawn. All this was rather more than his lordship had quite reckoned on, or bargained for. As 'Julian Scott' simply, there might have been a loophole for escape ; but as Lord Hermitage—well, he would get the document—he thought there was but one—out of Gladys' hands at a future time. When they had withdrawn, a brilliant smile of intense cunning puckered all the lawyer's face. He rubbed his cold fishy hands together, and chuckled as he noted the date and number of the fifty-pound Bank of Scotland note ; and carefully docketing up the duplicate certificate of marriage, locked it away with the other memoranda in his most secret repository.

'And now, dearest Julian, to return to poor papa,' said Gladys.

'It is impossible—we cannot return.'

'Oh, Julian ! you never said this before !' exclaimed the girl in, unutterable dismay. 'Why impossible ?'

'I have a diplomatic appointment in Germany—and in three days I am due at Wiesbaden. We must take the first train for London to-morrow morning.'

'We shall write from there, then ?' said Gladys, in tears.

'To your dear papa—of course, my darling.'

Meanwhile, the latter was passing his days and nights in hopeless misery. Of her fate and whereabouts he knew nothing. She had reached the verge of womanhood, growing up all that his heart could desire, and now, when his pride was highest, and every hope for a happy future seemed full, the idol of his affections was shattered, and, as he believed in his heart, destroyed and degraded for ever ! His heart felt as if cleft in twain ; honour, shame and sorrow, rather than rage, possessed him by turns and all together ; with occasional doubts, whether he had been kind enough, tender enough, and fatherly enough to her ! In what had he been wanting ? But his soul and conscience acquitted him of failure, and he felt that he had been lacking in nothing. Yet she had gone—gone ; she had left him for another—a stranger

—an unknown of yesterday—oh, bitterness ! Then came a letter from her, bearing a foreign post-mark, craving forgiveness, and saying that she was married, truly and loyally married, to Julian Scott ; but that the fact must be kept secret from all till he gave her permission to avow it : and as he read again and again the words her dear little hand had traced, the poor old soldier wept like a very child. So silence was to be his *rôle* for the future ; he could not understand it, and his spirit of honour felt piqued and imperilled at being compelled to adopt a system so singular and repugnant to his natural candour and openness of heart.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE CURSAAL.

AT Wiesbaden, Gladys became consoled with regard to her father, whose tender and thankful letters freely pardoned her, and promised that her marriage should be kept secret until such time as the Lord Hermitage felt himself—either by the death of his father, or otherwise—at liberty to divulge it ; but she could never prevail upon Julian to write to Captain Melville such a letter as should come from a son-in-law, or indeed to write to him at all ; as, by one excuse or other, he always parried her request, as if he had some strong reluctance to do so ; but for the first few months of her life the time passed joyously enough with her, in the pleasant little capital of the Duchy of Nassau.

The Duke was absent, but ‘ the city of lodging-houses,’ as it has been not inaptly named—every building nearly being appropriated either to the reception or entertainment of visitors—was at its gayest. The salons of the splendid Cursaal were always full, and every morning the long acacia walk which serves as a promenade for the imbibers of the steaming *kochbrunnen*, the white haze of which permeates from every gutter and drain in the place, was crowded with votaries of the Roman *Fontes Mattiaci*.

Accustomed from childhood to the bold and somewhat gloomy scenery of the Rhinns of Galloway, Gladys was delighted with the drives and rambles Julian gave her around Wiesbaden, which lies in a valley, with an open and fruitful

country spreading away towards the Rhine and the Maïne, and is bounded on two sides by hills covered with apple, cherry, and walnut groves, beyond which rises the fine range of the Taunus mountains.

She was never weary of the delightful walk which leads to the Dietenmühle, and to the Platte, or to the Duke's hunting-seat, amid woods abounding in deer, which every evening assemble at the sound of a horn to be fed.

'From being, as yet, only an *attaché* here,' said he, 'I shall get a higher diplomatic position at Vienna; and then think of the pleasures we shall have there, Gladys, in the great capital of Western Europe!'

'Oh, I am so happy here that I have no desire to change,' replied Gladys, kissing him tenderly, and resuming her pencil to finish a sketch of the old castle of Sonnenberg, as a gift for her father, for Julian's anticipations had no fresh joy for her; she had no longer any object to desire in the world, since her father was consoled and reconciled to her, than to please the man whom she had wedded, and to whom she had given herself, body and soul.

Julian was often unaccountably absent from her, but had always his official duties to plead, as an *attaché*, and as Gladys had no more idea of these than how the Grand Lama employs his leisure hours, she conceived they must be very arduous indeed.

But when he was with her the poor girl was supremely happy, and it seemed as if their secret courtship and their still more secret honeymoon were all a tender dream; and the days subsequent to the accident that flung him from the bay mare's saddle at her feet—the days when she first listened to his too seductive voice—were not yet over.

Yet clouds began to come anon, and hours, too, when amid the splendour of the Grand Hotel in the Schützenhofstrasse she began to marvel why she was never presented at the Ducal Court. To this, he opposed that her name must not reach the ears of his father, Lord Deloraine, after Julian had fenced the proposition in various ways. At one time the Duke was hunting in the Black Forest, sailing on the Rhine, absent at Vienna, or elsewhere, till Gladys ceased to think of the subject in her sweet simplicity of heart.

No English ladies called on her, and she knew not that her name was studiously omitted from the list of visitors published by the Cureverein ; but had she discovered this, the same answer would have been ready, 'the Earl of Deloraine.'

He never took her to the balls or concerts at the Cursaal, or to see the illumination of the parks and cascades ; her position was so secluded, her existence so little known beyond the servants who attended upon them in their private apartments, that it was certainly, even to simple Gladys, becoming painful and anomalous.

Did it all arise from the peculiar circumstances of her private marriage ? Surely the Wiesbadeners could know nothing about it ! But it galled her to think that Julian was moving in the society of other ladies, among whom she shrewdly suspected he was passing for an unmarried man.

Her servants were studiously respectful, because they were well paid for being so, but under all their outward respect lay much that the poor girl neither saw nor felt as yet, for they could draw deductions from their lord's strange neglect of her, that were, to Gladys, all unknown and all unsuspected.

'The Duke receives to-night at the Biberach palace,' she heard the secretary to the embassy say in a *sotto voce* to Julian, who but a few minutes before had informed her of his Highness being at St. Petersburg.

'Well—what then ?' asked Julian, with darkening brow.

'Only that the Baroness von Sonnenberg is with the Duchess.'

Lord Hermitage changed colour, and as his eyes sparkled, a quiet but covert smile spread over the face of the secretary.

'Very well—all right—her post is there,' said Julian, with a gesture of impatience.

Who and what was the Baroness von Sonnenberg to him ? Whence the plain falsehood as to the whereabouts of the Duke ? Alas for poor Gladys ! she was soon to learn all this, too fatally for her own peace.

Julian attended the Duke's reception that night in his diplomatic uniform, and was long absent—indeed, Gladys

knew not at what time he returned in the morning, and events came fast on each other afterwards.

Incidentally, she frequently heard of his being seen with this lady during his protracted absences, and when he returned he was now ever sullen, silent, reserved, and at times in an intolerable temper, especially if questioned ever so gently, ever so timidly, by the pale and trembling girl who still clung caressingly to him, and whom he distinctly and plainly refused to introduce to the Baroness.

His absences became longer ; sometimes he did not return till next day, and excused himself with being belated at the Klarenthal, a country house of the Duke's, shooting in the woods or fishing in the Nied near Hochst ; and so her worst suspicions became keenly roused, and she felt assured that her husband—her Julian—was getting completely into the power of one who deemed him a single man ; but Gladys knew not that, so far as the fair Baroness was concerned, it mattered little to her, in her intrigues, whether a man were married or single. 'It is not always the most deserving of the sex who inspire the strongest passions. Men have done wonderfully silly things for very indifferent women—have died for them even, if history does not tell tales—and for an angel man could do no more !'

Now that the first delirium of love was over, Gladys frequently looked at the certificate given to her by that hideous little Dumfries lawyer, and painful doubts occurred to her, for after suspecting Julian, it was easy to suspect the whole world !

Could that interview—it did not reach the dignity of a ceremony—could those few words mumbled in that dingy chamber be actually a marriage ? Oh, yes—yes—yes ! she could not—must not—dared not doubt it *now* !

Withal, she could not fail to detect and to feel, what she had never done before, or shrank from too closely analysing, faults of temper, omissions of kindness, and more, in Julian ; and even that his dark eyes were very near each other—an indication of a cruel spirit.

Oh, could her Julian be cruel ?

'Stay with me,' she asked him one night imploringly, as he was dressing to go forth.

'I cannot, Gladys—I am engaged for the ball at the Cursaal,' said he impatiently, assuming his sword and hat.

'You leave me exposed to sore trials.'

'Trials ?'

'Yes—am I not subjected to the speculations, and it may be the animadversions, of those around us ?'

'You are over-sensitive,' said he, unclasping the loving hands which sought to detain him, and coldly kissing her forehead, he hurried away.

Regretfully now she thought of her quiet home amid the Rhinns of Galloway, and of the little incidents that had made up the sum of her uneventful life there, till that fatal day when Julian came—for a fatal one she was beginning to deem it now !

Suddenly she thought to herself, why should she not go to the Cursaal, mingle with the throng there, and see for herself with whom her husband was, and how he was comporting himself? For a moment she paused, doubting the good of doing so, and fearing his anger ; and then, while her heart beat wildly, she screwed her courage to 'the sticking point,' and resolving to brave all, made some alterations in her costume, procured a 'Saison-Hauptkarte,' ordered a droski, and drove through the colonnade to the Cursaal, which was flooded with light and resounding to the strains of a magnificent band, and through the lofty windows of which she could see, as she drove past the shrubberies, the dancers and promenaders in thousands, in the various salons.

Through all these she passed as one in a dream, into that which was once the gaming-room, the Kur Saal *par excellence*, a splendid saloon of vast dimensions, the glorious roof of which is supported by columns of Limburg marble. Amid the vast maze of dancers it seemed in vain to look for Julian, but she seated herself to watch them, with aching eyes and an aching heart, as they flew past in quick succession, for waltzes and mazurkas alone filled the programme ; and Gladys was heedless that she had neither escort nor companion, knowing no one, and to all unknown, though her rare beauty won her the attention of many a cuirassier, uhlan, hussar, and the be-ribboned gentlemen who are thick as blackberries in Germany.

At last she became certain that he she sought was not in the dancing-saloon ; but there were others, the 'conversation-rooms,' and those for ices, gambling, and promenading, and through these she passed in succession, alone, seeing nothing of their splendour, nothing of those wonderful statues of pure Carrara marble, which were originally intended for Madame Lætitia Bonaparte, mother of Napoleon I., but by some stroke of fortune fell into the hands of the proprietors of the Cursaal.

Onward she passed, returned and passed again, scanning the laughing and happy groups of pleasure-seekers in vain, till she grew weary ; the waiters and stewards began to observe her, the rooms were emptying, the hour grew late, and she began to surmise that Julian might have returned to their hotel, and be astonished by her absence.

She had almost succeeded in flattering herself that such might be the case, when, as she passed through the Red-room, she saw, seated apart on a sofa in a corner, and nearly concealed by the pedestal of a statue by Ghinard of Rome, her husband and a lady, both too much absorbed in each other to be conscious of the presence of herself or any one else.

Dressed—some might have deemed it undressed—in the extreme of the mode—the lady was fair, *petite*, with *retroussé* features that were full of animation. She had a vast profusion of very golden hair—eyes that were pale hazel, but full of varying expression, and they were fixed upon Julian, who was proffering her some bon-bons, while laughingly she fanned herself.

The bon-bon, when drawn, exploded of course, and there came from it a slipper of cambric paper.

'Too small even for a child, I think, Augusta,' said Julian.

'Nay—I am sure it will fit *me*,' replied the other, as she laughingly and coquettishly lifted her skirt, displaying a lovely little foot and taper ankle, throwing off at the same time an embroidered shoe.

'Allow me,' said Julian, and kneeling, he tenderly and caressingly, but of course playfully, drew the paper slipper over her daintily stockinged foot.

'Thanks, darling—let it stay, I shall keep it as a souvenir

of one of our happiest nights,' said the lady, replacing her shoe, and speaking, though English, with an undoubtedly foreign accent. 'And now to resume what we were talking about, Julian—you remember, don't you?'

'No—pardon—what was it?'

'That you have been speaking of me to *her*, or she had her suspicions of me—she whom you call your wife.'

'I am not aware of it—but would it surprise you?'

'Very much.'

'Surely you must be aware that, having been long separated from you, no longer able to behold you, to think and to talk of you were my next greatest happiness.'

In reply to this untrue farrago, the lady said :

'To talk of *me*, to her whose caresses consoled you for my absence—am I to accept this paradox?'

'Augusta—hear me.'

'You yielded to her!'

'She yielded to me.'

'Rogue!' said the lady, tapping him with her fan.

'All men are not St. Anthonys, and I don't think that you would appreciate me the more for being one, Augusta.'

The poor listener's trembling heart died within her. Oh, what could all this mean—this most horrible mystery that seemed to be closing round her. Her senses reeled and she clung to the cold marble pedestal for support.

'Julian! Julian!' she exclaimed, in a tone in which affection, entreaty, and reproach were singularly and most touchingly mingled, while he started to his feet in astonishment that almost exceeded his anger; but the lady only raised her eyebrows and sat coolly fanning herself.

The *blasé* woman of the world—a woman of it in some of its worst phases—at a glance took in the whole situation: the girlish and innocent, yet confounded and indignant, wife, the surprised and exasperated *sposo*, detected at her very feet; and a smile of supreme amusement and cruel triumph at the former, and of quiet contempt and derision of the latter, rippled over her decidedly piquante little face—but it was a smile that filled Lord Hermitage with fury.

'Baroness, gnädige frau,' said a Nassau hussar, advancing with a low and smiling air of entreaty, 'I have been

searching for you everywhere. This is the last waltz, and it is ours.'

She rose and took his arm, saying to Hermitage :

'My lord, my presence will not trouble your interview,' and she swept away with her new partner, bestowing another Parthian glance at the pale and sinking Gladys, who now knew that she—this woman who called her husband 'Julian,' and to whom he spoke endearingly as 'Augusta'—was the Baroness von Sonnenberg.

'I hope we are not going to have a scene,' was her last remark to the hussar, 'because you know, Count, I detest scenes.'

The dark eyebrows of Lord Hermitage seemed to meet in one over his straight and handsome nose ; his black eyes seemed darker and nearer than ever now ; and his face *did* look cruel at that particular moment, for alas ! all the illusions of love had departed.

He absolutely glared at her.

'You here, Gladys—here, and alone ?'

'Yes,' said she faintly, and almost in a whisper.

'What brought you here ?'

'Despair !'

'Then let prudence suggest that we retire to our hotel at once, and together.'

She took his arm in silence, and clung to it, less perhaps in affection than in the fear that she should fall, and she kept her eyes closed lest she should see that terrible woman and encounter her mocking smile, and lay silent and tearless, as one in a swoon—in an utter stupor and prostration she was certainly—as they drove back through the lighted streets to the hotel in the Schützenhofstrasse.

CHAPTER IX.

THE DESPAIR OF THE LOST.

THAT night there was a scene between Gladys and her husband, the recollection of which ever filled her with horror ; it was so painful and degrading that she marvelled how—under these circumstances especially—she survived it. To her face he coarsely and bluntly expressed doubts of their being married at all.

'Oh, Julian,' moaned the poor hunted creature, 'if you talk thus I must appeal to him who performed the ceremony.'

'Ceremony!' said he, with fierce scorn.

'Yes—such as it was.'

'You are right to talk of it thus doubtfully—appeal to him—poor fool! do you know what he is?'

'A Scottish lawyer, is he not?'

'Right—one of those creatures, so many of whom come from orphan hospitals and reformatory schools, without a tie on earth, or an atom of home-feeling, to practise law, to the glory of hypocrisy and deceit, and to the shame of honour and honesty.'

How glibly this noble lord could talk on these points!

'So,' he added, 'what can you expect a thing such as he to do for you?'

'At least to verify this document,' said she, driven to bay at last, as she drew from her desk the certificate of Uriah Grippie, which Hermitage eyed for a moment with a fierce and startled expression. It would almost seem that until then he had forgotten its existence.

'Bah!' he exclaimed, as he snatched it from her hand, crumpled it up, and thrusting it into the fire, held her—while she, twisting, writhing, and shrieking, strove to rescue it—savagely back at arm's length, till it was utterly consumed, and even its blackened ashes passed away.

Then a deep low wail, as if from her very heart, escaped Gladys, and she sank downward, in a heap as it were, at his feet; for, like himself, she now believed that every proof of their marriage had perished, and she was borne, well-nigh senseless, to bed, while the hard-hearted Lord Hermitage, muttering an oath, threw himself on a fauteuil, lighted a long regalia, and began to reflect over the whole situation; but not with an iota of compunction.

Any emotion he felt was weariness combined with anger—weariness of the sad bearing of Gladys, and anger at the scene she had made before the little Baroness in the Cursaal. 'If,' says a writer of the last century, 'we examine impartially that estimate of pleasure which the higher ranks of society are apt to form, we shall probably be surprised to find how little there is in it, either of natural feeling or real satisfaction.'

Many a fashionable voluptuary, who has not totally blunted his taste or his judgment, will own, in the intervals of recollection, how often he has suffered from the insipidity or the pain of his enjoyments ; and that if it were not for the fear of being laughed at, it were sometimes worth while, even on the score of pleasure, to be virtuous.' But my Lord Hermitage, few though his years, was too case-hardened in vice to have, even temporarily, any such emotion.

Already the unchanging sweetness of Gladys—a sweetness blended with sadness for some time past—was palling, nay, *had* palled upon him ! Long habituated to conquests and triumphs, some brilliant and pleasing, others easy, coarse, and sensual, the present happiness was ceasing to be a sweet illusion. It bored and fretted him, and the too evident monetary loss involved by such a union, had he owned it to the world, was too serious for patient calculation *now* ; and when a man—more than all, such a man as Julian, Lord Hermitage—reasons and reflects thus, love, if it ever existed, is fading out of his heart, and even passion passes away.

Too often had he abandoned himself to pleasure without giving a thought to the future ; and but for the prompt destruction of that document, his present 'entanglement' with Gladys Melville might have proved very troublesome. He had, without doubt, long been disquieted ; and he had canvassed the value of a Scotch marriage all the more that he was now passionately re-enamoured of an old flame, Augusta von Sonnenberg, and though he had probably no intention of marrying *her*, he wished to be rid of Gladys on any terms, that he might freely obey the behests or fulfil the desires of the grasping old Earl his father, and win a bride with even Manchester gold, to patch up the fading fortunes of the House of Deloraine ; but the latter knew not the power that the Baroness had, and was yet to have, over his dissipated son.

'And as for going home,' thought the latter, smoking his regalia viciously, 'even if the old boy at Deloraine dies—home to Scotland, who would do that, if living elsewhere were possible ? I shall be a representative peer one day—whatever that may mean ; but I never cared for politics—too lazy for that—so Scottish rights, wrongs, and rubbish are not at all in my way. No, no, Julian, my boy—the Continent is the

place for you, and Scotland may be——' and the sentence ended in a long puff of smoke.

The golden-haired little Baroness, with all her winning little ways and tricks of Continental manner, was now his idol, and daily his passion for her was increasing all the more that she kept him considerably in suspense, and an occasional kiss or caress served but to fan the flame ; while he, knowing her to be in somewhat slender circumstances, and too skilled in the ways of the world to be in any way befooled as Gladys had been, felt himself compelled to hesitate before committing himself too far, in any way beyond verbal promises, and the fair Augusta was too wary to trust to these, or had been so as yet, though the advent of Gladys had given her considerable alarm.

'Oh, Julian—oh, my husband,' sobbed the latter, when she saw him dressing to leave her on the following evening, after a day of entire absence—'where are now your vows to me—your tender protestations?'

'Little fool !' said he impatiently, while brushing away at his thick dark hair with a pair of ivory-handled brushes, 'have you yet to learn that there are times when it is usual for men to vow something or swear anything?'

'Times?' said she, with quivering lips.

'When they find a weak little loving goose is silly enough to believe them. But you have taunted me and tried me more than enough about that paper, that certificate or whatever it is. I was angry ; it is gone, and no power on earth can restore it.'

She regarded him with haggard eyes, and said faintly, 'Julian, I will tire or taunt you no more.'

'Thanks very much, but I had resolved to take care of that,' replied he, as he jauntily left her ; and as he closed the door, though the sound thereof jarred prophetically on her heart, she little thought that she was never again, too probably, to see him in this world !

'Gnadige frau' (Gracious Madame), said the Oberkellner of the hotel next morning, as she sat alone by an untasted breakfast, 'I have been desired to give you this.'

It was a sealed packet that lay on a silver salver, and was

addressed to her as 'Miss Gladys Melville,' in the handwriting of Lord Hermitage ; and a dreadful certainty, rather than a foreboding, seized her as she tore open the envelope, and found it to contain a legal document and a letter, which ran thus :

'MY DEAR GLADYS,—By the time you read this I shall be *en route* for Vienna, and have thought, under all the circumstances, it was better to avoid a scene, which I dread, with its explanations, tears, reproaches, and all that sort of thing. It is well that we are not bound together for life, as you are too exacting, and I too fond of liberty.

'Do not believe that my sentiments have changed towards you, but the lady with whom you saw me possesses over me that hold and those ties which our imaginary Scotch marriage would never give you, and I yield but to inexorable Fate. Pardon me, Gladys, but you can never in reality be more than a friend to me—a very dear one, of course ; and if you still love me, I trust in your acceptance of the enclosed gift, which, as you are still young and beautiful, may easily obtain for you a husband who will render you more happiness than ever could have been accorded you by the unfortunate

'JULIAN.'

This cold and hypocritical letter—for it was both, with all its conventional phraseology—this letter, so cutting and awful in its sentence, was accompanied by a document or deed, by which his agent, a Writer to Her Majesty's Signet in Edinburgh, was empowered to grant her an annuity of £200 per annum.

Mechanically the girl's bloodshot and tear-inflamed eyes wandered over them both—those fatal enclosures ! What meant those cruel and terrible words, 'that *hold* and those *ties* ?' The papers fell from the relaxed hands in which she buried her face, wherein a terrible expression was gathering.

The despair of Ariadne was rising in her soul. She rapidly reached that condition of mind and nerve when excess of grief leads to insensibility—an excess that neither cries nor tears can relieve, and she fell prone on the floor in a deep, deep swoon.

On recovering from this, long after, the girl, abandoned

now and in a foreign country, took in the whole horrors of her situation, and could weep passionately, bitterly, and copiously.

It was not because she had seen the illusions of rank, title, position, and supposed wealth crumble and fade away. Oh no! she thought of none of those things, of which some people are all their lives in pursuit; she could only think—if one so crushed, so stunned and overwhelmed could think at all—of the glorious love she had bestowed, and of the love she had believed herself to possess in return, the love that was lost for ever!

Could it be by any fault of her own, any shortcoming, any casual coldness, of which she questioned herself in vain? The charm of life had departed; *he* had gone to return no more; gone, as it was too soon proved, with another! Degraded, forsaken, alone, she was no longer a wife; another, she had been told, possessed ‘that hold and those ties’ which she believed to have been her own: no longer a wife, she thought again and again, when, oh my God! she felt that ere long she must inevitably become a—mother!

‘A mother! Oh let me die—let me die!’ she implored of heaven; then she thought of her unborn child and prayed for pardon, and staggering up, said, ‘I shall arise and go to my father. *He* will not repel me, and Julian—Julian, surely, when he hears that our child is born, will come to me in my misery. Oh yes—yes—yes—it shall be as a pledge of union, a bond of peace between us, when his present madness has passed away. But that woman, with her golden hair and her terrible smile—that horrible woman; God may forgive her, though I never can!’

She twisted, interlaced, and wrung her little white hands in a bewildered and unsettled way, while in her fixed and staring eyes—staring, as it were, on some unseen object or distant horizon—she had the expression, action, and aspect of a somnambulist, rather than a person awake.

‘Oh, my father’s name, old, honoured, and stainless!’ she muttered; ‘my reputation in life, my peace of mind—all gone for ever, yea, my God—for ever! But home, home; let me go home, to my father’s heart and my mother’s grave, and the dear old Rhinns of Galloway!’

CHAPTER X.

A SAD SEQUEL.

IT was a chill evening in October, darkening into a stormy night, and the old Captain sat alone in his little dining-room, gazing dreamily into the red changing embers of the fire, thinking sadly of the girl who had left him ; of what, or of whom else, did he ever think ! Alone. He was always so now, for since that fatal night when Gladys had departed he had shunned all society, and avoided even his best friends. He was thinking now that surely her letters must have miscarried of late, as for a month past he had heard nothing of her. It was a weird gloaming among the Rhinns ; lightning had been playing about the summit of Clanyard Fell ; gusts of wind ever and anon shook the house and wailed amid the leafless trees, and the harsh screaming of aquatic fowls, that fly by night as well as day, could be heard occasionally as they sped inland, as if betokening a wild night in the North Channel. The old clock on the mantelpiece went tic-tack, tic-tack, monotonously, and a strange foreboding that something was about to happen, he knew not what, was filling the heart of Captain Melville with oppressive thoughts. The firelight was casting weird shadows in the room. Before the ruddy hearth, Gyp and the cosy cat lay coiled up together, and Mysie had just covered up the cages of the birds for the night—the pets of the absent or lost Gladys, when the terrier started up with quivering ears, as if he detected an approach of which others were unaware. Then it came distinctly to the ear—a tremulous ring, as if given by an uncertain hand, summoned Mysie to the door, and the cry that escaped her brought Captain Melville rushing into the entrance-hall, where stood a female figure in the dusk, clinging wildly to the old nurse who, when in her motherless state, had cared for her so tenderly from her birth.

‘Father,’ exclaimed a broken voice, that thrilled his heart to its inmost core, ‘father, take me to your heart and let me die there !’

‘Gladys, Gladys !’ was all the startled man could utter as he clasped the sinking girl to his breast—sinking with her

own terrible thoughts and with fatigue, as she had come afoot from a wayside railway station.

Repentance often comes too late ; but Melville had no words of reproach for Gladys ; and yet her return brought him no joy, as he heard, at intervals that were filled up by tears, caresses, and outbursts of despair, the miserable story of how she had been deluded. Her father listened to her in flaming wrath against Lord Hermitage. There had been a time when he would have travelled to the ends of the earth to have punished him ; but those days were past now, and even the law could neither procure peace nor retribution ; and bowing his head—now silvered much since last she had seen it—the waves of sorrow, of shame, and affliction seemed to flow over him as he listened to her. It was not until some days after that he could realise all the horrors of Gladys' position, and he gazed with something of stony wonder on the pallid beauty of the girl, which in its deathly expression reminded him so painfully of her mother in her last hours. Anon a gust of passionate rage seized him ; he tore the letter and document written by Hermitage into fritters, but resolved to take some action in the matter and see his daughter righted. What power this foreign Baroness had over Lord Hermitage, whether legal, as his letter seemed to import, or otherwise, he cared not to inquire. He knew that already his reputation was so bad that scarcely any woman of family would commit her daughter to him ; and any appeal to the Earl, his father, would be futile. So, meanwhile, he resolved to see the lawyer who had aided and abetted—for such he deemed it—the young lord in his scheme of villainy.

A swift train soon brought him to the old Burgh-town, beside the Nith, and in prosecuting his inquiries as to where Mr. Grippie dwelt, he felt instinctively that the looks and answers of those he questioned were not encouraging as to the character of him he sought.

One man uttered a malediction upon his name, as having been the means of ruining him ; another cursed him as a usurer and psalm-singing hypocrite. A third said : ' I thought, sir, that most folk in the town kenned where Grippie lives.'

' But I am a stranger here.'

' Then take ye care, sir.'

‘Why?’

‘If ye look at him, it will cost you six and eightpence; and if ye shake his hand, thirteen and fourpence.’

‘I shall not do the latter, at all events,’ said the Captain, sternly, as he was in no humour for jesting.

‘Well, that is his house with the big brass plate; and much of the same metal you’ll find in his face.’

Captain Melville sighed as he approached it; so much hung upon the result of his interview with this man that his heart felt sick as he thought of the situation, and his soul seemed to go back to *her* who was again at home.

Now, it chanced that he could not have visited Mr. Grippie at a more inopportune time. By that morning’s post the lawyer had received a letter from Lord Hermitage to the effect that ‘though of course the supposed marriage was all bosh and nonsense, at any rate it would be better to commit the affair to oblivion, in case the girl or her friends were disposed to be rusty about it;’ and a cheque for a good round sum, as ‘hush money,’ though it was not called so, was enclosed for Mr. Grippie’s acceptance.

He, with a saturnine smile on his mean visage, placed the cheque in his cash-box, carefully docketed the letter, ‘The Lord Hermitage, anent his marriage,’ and had just locked it fast beside the duplicate certificate of that event, when Captain Melville was announced.

‘Captain Melville? Oho!—the game is beginning already!’ thought the lawyer, whose naturally intriguing, malignant, and mischievous heart bounded with delight at the *hold* he had over so many persons. The Captain and his daughter were at his mercy; so also were the Lord Hermitage and the Earl of Deloraine; for while he, Uriah Grippie, possessed that duplicate document, the former dared not contract another matrimonial engagement, and, whatever happened, he could weave out one of the best pleas that ever was aired in the House of Lords.

The smile that sprang from triumph and avarice expanded into one of welcome as Captain Melville entered, and he motioned him to a chair with the jerky nod which he meant to be a bow.

The fine looking old soldier, with grief and shame imprinted

on his noble face, regarded the lawyer, against whom his soul was aflame with indignation, blandly, as he assumed at first an exterior of ease that he was far from feeling ; while the latter, shrewd-looking, suspicious, with craft in every line of his vulgar visage, and in every emotion of his heart, which ascribed in general unseen motives to all, thought deeply of how he was to handle the matter in its first stage, and listened to all the Captain had to say with an inscrutable expression of face, till he heard of the document destroyed by Lord Hermitage at Wiesbaden, and the start that he gave would have been visible to any one less occupied than Captain Melville was then.

‘You are sure, sir, that his lordship did as you say,’ said he ; ‘and that the certificate was destroyed.’

‘Too surely, sir, to her sorrow and horror, did my poor girl see it consumed before her eyes.’

‘Then no proofs of this marriage exist,’ responded Uriah Grippie, as his fishy eyes wandered to the strong box wherein the duplicate lay, and fresh emotions of satisfaction grew up within him.

‘And how dared you to act as you have done in this matter, Mr. Grippie?’

‘Dared, sir?’

‘Yes,’ continued Melville, repressing, as well as he could, his growing wrath.

‘When clients who are of age come before me—best keep your temper, my dear sir ; you will gain nothing by losing it with me,’ said the lawyer, as he lay back in his arm-chair and placed the tips of his fingers together, while regarding with a malicious smile the torture his visitor was undergoing.

‘Was this union a legal one?’

‘Quite so.’

‘Thank God for that!’ said Melville fervently. ‘But irregular?’

‘Quite so.’

‘Was it registered?’

‘No ; it was not my duty to do that. When parties are convicted of having contracted an irregular marriage, they must register it in the parish where it has taken place. When marriage is established by a decree of declaration, it

is lawful for either of the parties to register it in the parish of their domicile or usual residence.'

'I don't understand all this,' said the old soldier, wearily; and, as it seemed, unconsciously, he strode across the room, and returning, grasped tremblingly, as if for support, the back of a chair, and asked, in a voice subdued by grief and passion, but terribly earnest:

'*You* wrote the document which Lord Hermitage destroyed?'

'I have not said so.'

'My daughter says so.'

'Who will believe her word against mine, if it comes to an issue?'

'Dare you say this to me?'

'Dare again; pooh, my dear sir, let us be reasonable.'

'Consider what a father must feel, situated as I am,' urged Captain Melville, whom the lawyer's tone was fast rousing to fury—for he felt that this man might have saved Gladys from ruin. 'How could you abet that which you admit was an irregular marriage?'

'I saw that the young lord was set upon it; and your daughter too, for the matter of that. I must own to feeling some surprise that so little satisfied her scruples; but she was so blindly in love.'

'Will you make an affidavit before a justice of the peace that such a document as that destroyed by the Lord Hermitage existed and was penned by you?'

'Most distinctly I shall *not*!' replied Mr. Grippie, with great emphasis, and the Captain began to see the hopelessness of his position; 'by your own account, he seems to have offered your daughter—most liberally, I must say—two hundred per annum.'

'The black-hearted scoundrel!'

'She should have taken it, nevertheless.'

'Taken it!' thundered Captain Melville. 'Why?'

'Because such offers are not made every day to a cast-off—'

But the sentence was never finished by Mr. Uriah Grippie. The Captain's heavy silver-mounted cane described a circular cut in the air—there was a blow, a crash, and the lawyer fell

senseless beside his writing-table, while his assailant, who felt very much inclined to give him a parting kick, put on his hat, buttoned his gloves, passed into the street and took his departure homeward, with the bitter conviction that all was over so far as concerned Gladys, and his heart seemed to fill with tears.

Mr. Uriah Grippie was found by his clerks and household in a heap on the floor, with an ugly contusion on his forehead—a regular ‘Lockerbie lick’—the work, as he alleged, of a madman; and by all who were cognisant of the catastrophe, and knew his character, it was deemed very odd that he never took any means to have his assailant pursued or prosecuted; but, doubtless, he deemed the cheques of Lord Hermitage excellent plaster for such a bruise.

But that blow rendered him for life the mortal enemy of Melville and his daughter, and he registered an unuttered oath that never, unless Hermitage crossed him, or failed to ‘bleed freely,’ should justice be done to the girl who had been deluded. On reaching his home a fresh shock awaited the poor Captain. Overcome by all that she had undergone of late, Gladys had prematurely given birth to twin boys, who seemed likely to thrive and did thrive well and hardily; while their mother, for many a day thereafter, seemed likely to die; but she had them baptised by the names of Julian and Gerard Melville. How days, weeks, and months passed on after that event Gladys scarcely knew; but even her loving heart, that had long hoped against hope, grew tired, if such could be, of aching for the repentance of one who would never repent, and who would come back to her never more. Winter was past; the sweet spring time of the year was drawing on, and when she sat in her favourite seat in the garden, where Julian and his horse had come plunging over the hedge, she often asked of herself, was her late past life—yea, her present—a dream from which she would awaken.

The old garden was overgrown with grass now, and its flower-beds were choked by weeds; desolation there, spoke of the desolation that reigned in the hearts of the household. The pigeons from the old dovecot seemed to recognise her return and her presence there again, and again they were cooing and wheeling about her, who was wont to feed them

daily. Gyp was nestling at her feet, and the young buds were bursting in all their vernal greenery as of old ; but spring brought no gladness to the heart of the girl. Even her children, though she regarded them pitifully and lovingly, were rather an aggravation than a consolation to her ; and there ever recurred to her that morning of horror—that morning of her desertion in the hotel at Wiesbaden.

Abandoned to sad reverie, she spent hours on that garden-seat, motionless as a statue, and absorbed in thought, with her arms hanging listlessly by her side ; her eyes often fixed on the evening star as it twinkled into sight above the dark mountain-peaks that stood out black and distinct against the pure blue or amber of the sky, where not a breath of air was stirring, and no sound but the bark of a distant sheep-dog broke the perfect silence. She could remember when she loved such quiet evenings, when there was something to wish for, and a future to look forward to—something unknown, beyond even the midsummer, when the corn was ripening, the trees in full leaf, and the flowers in all their glory ; but now—oh now ! In obedience to her wishes and his own, Captain Melville quitted the Rhinns of Galloway—the place where his hitherto quiet and happy life had learnt its bitterest lesson, and where his dead wife lay in the humble village burying-ground under the shadow of an old Galwegian Kirk—and sought a new home further north and eastward, where they and their sad story were unknown and unheeded, on the verge of Ettrick Forest, the pleasant ivy-clad cottage of Fairy Knowe, the place where we find him and his grandsons at the opening of our narrative.

In the nervous consciousness of shame, however unmerited, she had shrunk from her own sex, and all their natural questionings concerning her 'widowhood,' and their real or affected interest in her and her children. She never cursed the author of all this, as ten thousand other women might have done, who had been so wronged ; but she bore her cross, remembering One who had borne His cross before her—meekly, saintly, and patiently ; only longing for the time when she should, with all her tender love for her two little ones, lay it down with her life and be at peace ; and the time soon came. The few years of mental suffering

endured by Gladys ere she passed away—years of futile longing and passionate regret, had given much of holy beauty to the expression and character of her face, which became so saintly that few could look upon it without wonder and compassion. From the day that Gladys returned to him in her great sorrow, Captain Melville seemed to become older and graver; yet doubly sweet, tender, and placid was his manner to her, in the new home they had been compelled to seek. For hours she would sit on a hassock by his knee, as she had been wont to do in childhood; but now she would have one, or both of her babes by her side. Long would the lonely father and daughter sit thus, in silence, broken only by a caressing word, when he would bend his withered face to kiss her rich soft hair or her saddened forehead, on which she would press her interlaced fingers and weep silently and sorrowfully—how sorrowfully, God alone knew, for her heart was broken, and she felt that she was passing away from him and her doubly helpless little ones.

And in these silent hours, when the shadows of evening deepened, the old man would sit dreamily calling back the years that had passed away—memories of the long-since dead, and of the never-forgotten past—his regiment, the glittering parade, the jovial mess-table with its boon companions, all now scattered far apart, and many of whom were gathered with the dead, his young and loving wife's face, the birth of Gladys. All seemed unreal now; and could he be the same man to whom all these things had happened long, long ago?

The twin boys grew tall and strong and handsome; but *not* under the loving eyes of Gladys, who died while they were yet children. And when there came a day in which all the old man's tears and prayers—and heaven alone knew how bitter were those tears and how agonising his prayers—could not keep Gladys one hour longer in this world; and in that terrible time when her soul was passing away to the foot of the Great White Throne, it was not of the father who knelt beside her in voiceless agony, but of him who had deceived her she thought.

'Oh, press me to your heart, my husband,' she murmured; 'do not cast me off for that terrible woman with the wicked

smile. Surely there is not such a disparity between us, and love levels all : press me to your heart—to your heart, Julian, for I am dying now !

None could tell the moment when her spirit fled. She had fallen into a soft sleep, and little Julian and the golden-haired Gerard nestled quietly beside her, and spoke to each other in hushed tones lest they should ‘wake poor mamma.’

But ‘poor mamma’ never woke again !

CHAPTER XI.

AT THE WHITE WICKET.

THE secret history of their family, so suddenly revealed, filled the two young men with mingled shame and dismay ; but more especially Julian. He knew but too well the pride of race and position as a county family that existed among the Kingsmuirs, and conceived that now he could and should never more meet his loving and beautiful Kate, and this conviction inspired his young and ardent heart with an emotion of bitterness that was too keen to last, in its strength at least. But how was he to cease to meet her—to break with her, and thus appear false, untrue, or changeable, without an explanation ; and in what terms could that explanation, so humiliating to himself, be made ? To Julian and Gerard the past memory of their mother became more vivid now, and with pallid cheeks and moistened eyes, the brothers regarded each other tenderly, and together communed in thought over all that might and ought to have been, and all that was now. The dark lord who had acted so insolently to Julian lived still, but their mother was dead, and reparation was impossible now, though retribution was not. The position in life they had lost, or rather had never attained, was beyond all human power of attainment *now*, and this conviction was the most crushing feature of their story, which both devoutly wished they had never learned. Could they but have known of that secret document, kept among the repositories of Uriah Grippie for his own purposes of greed, and vengeance for the punishment inflicted on him by Captain Melville some twenty years before ! It was impossible for the brothers not to repine at a destiny so hard as

theirs, and the obscurity to which they were condemned ; for, by very contrast, that seemed an obscure life now which had been, if comparatively humble, *couleur de rose* enough.

On the busy world—the world of action—Captain Melville had long turned his back for ever, save a little county and justice of the peace work, or a few hour's fly-fishing. His sole dissipation was to linger over a glass of claret with Colonel Kingsmuir, or some other old chum, playing chess or draughts, and talking of 'the service' and the changes effected therein, sending it effectually to the dogs ; but now the re-appearance of Lord Hermitage disturbed sorely the quiet current of his thoughts, raising to white-heat all the bitterness of the buried past. What the Captain had to leave, in a monetary way, when death came, might have been enough for one, but certainly not for *two* ; and often when the brothers were kindly and earnestly discussing their inevitable future, Gerard proposed to leave all to Julian and Kate Kingsmuir, in his singleness of heart, and push his own way in the world with his talents ; but poor Gerard forgot that, in the estimation of the Kingsmuirs, all the Captain possessed on this side of the grave was deemed a very poor inheritance indeed. Gerard had distanced all his competitors during his scholastic career, for many who were his equals in ability were inferior to him in the habit of literary industry, combined with patience and enthusiasm.

Julian had now a wild and romantic craving to make a name brilliant beyond that he had lost, in any line but literature, which was not his *rôle* ; war, politics, or trade ; a youth's wild, vague vision ! And what was the name he had lost ? he strove, but in vain, to think scornfully. Historic certainly, and yet not great in later years, for 'the first Lord of Deloraine had sold his Union vote, like the Earl of Balcarres, for £500,' as the old Captain said contemptuously. Since then the Earls of Deloraine had been all mediocre nobodies, and among 'the sixteen nobles of the North,' when not dissipating in London they were vegetating on their Border estates. Yet Julian and Gerard felt conscious of the sophistry of thus seeking to undervalue the line they came from, and their hearts were rent and torn ; crushed, at the very outset of life, as it were, by the painful antecedents

we have narrated, yet fired by vague hopes of righted wrongs, and vengeance for their injured mother's sake ; but vengeance on whom—their father ?

As in a dream that night the brothers knelt side by side when the little household at Fairy Knowe met for the usual orisons. Julian's thoughts wandered wide indeed of the simple family prayer delivered by his white-haired grandfather ; he thought not of the present, but of the future—the vague and cloudy future.

From all he could learn incidentally, or cared to learn, Lord Hermitage had not the shadow of a doubt that the two young men named Melville, who resided at Fairy Knowe with their grandfather, Captain Gerard Melville, were his sons, and of the wife he had used so infamously. But their marriage he had never believed in, viewing it merely as a necessary formula to satisfy the scruples of the simple and confiding Gladys ; and he had always reflected that even were it a true and binding one, the proofs thereof had perished in the flames at Wiesbaden. Moreover, though Mr. Uriah Grippie lived—as his lordship knew to his cost—his two clerks, the only witnesses to the document, were both dead. Destitute of all common affection, even of the natural instinct that leads the lower animals to love their young, he cared to think no more in the matter than to consider 'how deuced awkward and absurd it would be' in him—a gay man of the world, a *vaurien* still, with the matrimonial intentions he began seriously to have in view, lest it might be too late—to announce to society and to his 'set' that he had 'a couple of big, hulking sons, fellows verging on twenty years of age !'

Bah ! the thing was not to be thought of for an instant. To proceed to thrust themselves upon *his* notice never for a moment occurred to either of the lads, for both were high-spirited and as proud as Lucifer ; and ere long a deadly wrong that Julian was about to receive at his hands widened the breach between him and his unnatural father for ever. Julian had not the heart to keep his appointment with Kate at the White Wicket next day, so he left it over till the following, according to their arrangement : they had always now a

substitute hour, in case of failure or unavoidable interruption. But soon the sweet dreams of hope, if blended with tremulous doubt, began to rise in his young breast again. Could she, even if she learned his secret story, love him the less therefore? He repelled the fear; but there were her father and her mother, whom he knew to be both ambitious and proud; and then it was, when he thought of them, that he felt a beggar in blood as in pocket, and his heart, and his fiery soul too, died within him. And on the day when he was too faint or sick-hearted to meet her, he felt his blood run cold with unmerited humiliation when he shrunk into a thicket as Kate Kingsmuir and her sisters and their friend, Amy Kerr, escorted by Lord Hermitage, came cantering past, all beautifully mounted, a lively, laughing riding party, bound for a scamper among the green country lanes: and that man was *his* father!

‘Oh, heaven—good, kind heaven!’ thought Julian, as he went to the trysting-place on the following day, his whole soul absorbed in the sad and humiliating story we have narrated in the preceding chapters. ‘I have been too happy—we have been too happy, for such joy to last long. Gerard ever predicted that some cloud would come into our sky, and the cloud has come! Dear and gentle Gerard, why had you that thought; why a prevision of evil?’

The little private wicket, half hidden amid the green depths of a grand old hedge, suddenly opened, and Kate, all bright and blooming, stood before him, and playfully scolded him for failing to keep the appointment she had omitted to keep herself. Bitter thoughts were surging through the soul of Julian, but the soft hands of Kate roused him, and her tender lips consoled him with kisses, to be remembered sadly and painfully when seas rolled between him and her, and there came ‘that death in life—the days that are no more!’

In Kate’s *piquante* face there was something that we cannot put in words, its best attribute being that its brilliance of varying expression was beyond description. Her masses of ruddy golden hair were gathered in a great knot at the back of her handsome head; her white and perfect throat was encircled by a blue velvet ribbon, whereat hung a diamond locket, which was the gift of Lord Hermitage, though Julian

knew it not—a birthday gift, of which she forgot, perhaps, to speak.

‘You have the new photo for me, darling?’ said Julian, as they strolled along a narrow woodland, where no one ever met them.

‘Yes, here it is,’ said the girl, with a coy smile of pride and pleasure.

‘And in the dearest of velvet cases ! oh, how sweet it is—how like you !’

‘I *do* think I am pretty, Julian !’ she exclaimed, laughing.

‘Pretty, Kate ! oh ——’ et cetera.

‘Julian, what do you think Lord Hermitage said ?’

‘I neither know nor care !’

‘Julian !’ said Kate, surprised by his tone and the sudden gloom that overspread his face ; ‘but you should care.’

‘Well, and he said ?’

‘I have a hundred minds not to tell you.’

‘Pardon me, darling—but do say.’

‘I was so beautiful that no photo could ever do me justice, and I felt so happy to hear him say so, Julian, because—because——’

‘What, my love ?’

‘I instantly thought of you, and what you must think of me. But, Julian, you never told me that I was beautiful,’ she added, pouting. ‘Why is that ?’

‘Because I love you, Kate, and love never runs out into extravagant compliments, but leaves admiration to be inferred by tenderness and faith.’

‘Dear old thing, you talk quite like a book.’

And so they sauntered slowly on, hand in hand, full of themselves only, with the flaky sunshine falling on them in golden gleams athwart the thick leafy pathway. Poor young hearts ! hitherto they had never grown tired of talking of the future ; but now there was a cloud on Julian’s brow, and a hesitation in his manner, which he strove to conceal from her. But there rested no shadow of doubt on the fair bright face of Kate, when they spoke of the long, long life of supreme happiness they were to pass together—a life of love, joy, and pleasure, for so they thought, as Paul and Virginia thought before them, in the simplicity of their minds and freshness of soul

—a life in some Utopia all their own. And when Julian gazed on that sweet, fair face, so trustingly upturned to his, he longed to be the master—not of such a baronial abode as Deloraine—but of some pretty cottage buried among roses—a fairy cage, such as lovers dream of; yet had he searched the secret heart of Kate Kingsmuir, he would have found her preference for some such dwelling as Claude Melnotte painted in words, as standing by the Lake of Como. Anyway, ‘perhaps there is no period of this mortal life so truly happy as that in which all our thoughts are looking forward to some great joy to come.’ So with these anticipations their young love had been a delicious idyll, and both had seemed to float upon a stream of joy, till this cloud came over Julian.

‘Kate,’ said he, after a pause and with much hesitation, ‘are you sure—quite sure——?’

‘Sure of what?—why do you hesitate and grow pale?’

‘That you really love me?’

‘Julian!’ cried Kate, impetuously and reproachfully.

‘That you do not mistake mere liking—it may be, mere friendship, or old acquaintance, for, for’—his lips quivered—‘for love?’

Her eyes grew moist with the purest tenderness, and her lovely lips quivered too, as she saw, with something of wonder, a yearning, hungry, almost hunted expression gathering in the dark and handsome eyes of her lover.

‘I am sure—certain as we live, that I love you, dearest, dearest Julian!’

‘Thanks, my darling—oh, thank you!’

‘What more can I say?’

‘Nothing,’ said he, in a choking voice.

‘What strange mood is this? Are you satisfied?’

‘Quite.’

He restrained his tears with difficulty, for they were tears of overwhelming tenderness and joy.

‘But why all these questions?’ asked the girl with increasing wonder; ‘surely you do not doubt me?’

‘Oh no—it would be vile to do so.’

‘And so cruel, Julian.’

He caught her in his arms and pressed her convulsively to

his breast ; but his sudden emotion was unintelligible to Kate, who said hastily : ‘ Now let us part, darling—a man, a stranger, is loitering near ; good-bye till to-morrow,’ and she hurriedly left him.

Julian turned back to the wicket, feeling relieved of much of his deep emotion, though he had told her nothing, and he was too full of the interview to take heed of who the loiterer was ; but it proved to be Ringan Jannock, whom more than once he had reproved and threatened for poaching. Kate’s love and tenderness were a glorious balm to the tortured spirit of poor Julian, though he feared that his reticence to her on the discovery he had made amounted to a species of treachery, so sensitive was he in his love for her. He could not risk her probable loss by the revelation of it ; and so, for the time, let it sleep. As for poor Gerard, he had no such solace, but remained for days sunk in deep thought, and wandering in the woods or on the solitary hill sides, pondering whether aught could be done to remove the secret stigma under which he felt that he and his brother lay.

CHAPTER XII.

WHICH CONTAINS MUCH IN LITTLE.

EVENTS, as yet unforeseen, were on the *tapis*, to mar the happiness and cloud the sunshine of Julian Melville and Kate Kingsmuir. The first rough awakening from his day-dreams—those dreams that are so sweet when love is in its flush—was caused by some remarks made by Captain Melville to him and his brother on the eventualities of the future, which neither he nor Gerard, the former most certainly, had as yet fully considered.

‘ I am getting an old man now, boys, and I cannot be with you always,’ said he one day to Julian and Gerard, to whom he had been as father and mother combined since childhood, and as he spoke, they felt their hearts wrung, for they long had seen how years and thought were telling upon him mentally and bodily.

‘ Don’t talk so, grandfather,’ said Gerard, laying a hand on his shoulder caressingly.

‘ But I must, for there is no disguising the fact that age is,

as Ossian says, "dark and unlovely," and the time is coming when my place will be vacant. Many are the vicissitudes of life, and the lives that are before you both are as yet too vague and undefined to me. My means are small—more than half of them will die with myself ; yet will I do what I can to provide you with a remedy in some measure against the pecuniary difficulty that may be before you.'

'Grandfather !' exclaimed Julian, scarcely knowing what to say in answer to a preamble that perplexed and grieved him.

'You cannot spend all your days here,' continued the old man, shaking his head : 'you among your books, Gerard, and you, Julian, with your fishing-rod and gun. In my loneliness of heart, and, it may be, my selfish desire not to part with you, I have already kept you both too long at Fairy Knowe, forgetting that you have the battle of life to fight, and that by trade——'

'Trade, grandfather !' interrupted Julian.

'Well, by business or profession you have each to push your way in the world, and of course far away from me and this sequestered place.'

'But how—when ?' asked Julian.

'How and when are to me the mystery,' said the old man, with a weary and sorrowful air, as he let his chin sink upon his breast.

'And a mystery to me too, grandfather,' added Julian, as he felt his heart die within him, for he seemed in all this to hear the sentence of separation between himself and Kate Kingsmuir ; yet he felt keenly the justice and propriety of his grandfather's views, withal that they were so vague, and the perplexing subject had been recurred to more than once before. But for his high pride and firm sense of the wrong done to his dead daughter, there were times when the old soldier was almost inclined to bow to fate, and to humiliate himself before the heartless traitor who had destroyed her, and to seek at his hands some aid or influence for his two sons, now verging almost on manhood without any adequate provision for their future, or any provision at all, save the little that he—poor old man—could leave them. But anon he scorned to make the secret of their wants, or almost of

their existence, known to one who seemed sedulously to ignore both. Captain Melville was not ignorant of the regard that Julian and the bright-eyed Kate Kingsmuir seemed to have for each other ; but deemed it the fancy of a boy and girl—a fancy that was doomed to pass away and come to nothing : all the more so that the views of her wealthy parents were far beyond tolerating in any way the attentions of a penniless lad like Julian. But he loved to see the young pair together, and to have the girl about him, as she was always so tender and loving to himself ; for it has been said, with truth, that there is ‘an inexpressible charm to careworn age in the hope that can never more be its own, and the illusions which can never again lend a grace to the beaten path of existence. It is memory that makes the old indulgent to the young, and thus it was the recollection of his own early years, when as a young and happy subaltern he had won the love of Gladys’ mother, that made him view with tender interest the passion that Julian had for Kate, hopeless and foolish as he deemed it, and all unknown, as he certainly conceived it to be, to the household at Kingsmuir. And the brothers talked for the thousandth time of their hapless mother’s story, of their own birth, and of the slender chance, or rather the hopelessness, of proving themselves the legitimate sons of Lord Hermitage—the heirs of lordly Deloraine ; going over the same subject, the same dreary ground, again and again in their utter helplessness of coming to any conclusion, proof or elucidation, for Uriah Grippie, the only man who could have helped them, knew not of their existence ; moreover, he was the foe of their grandfather, and by more than one handsome remittance of hush money, prior to their mother’s death, was completely in the interest of Lord Hermitage.

But reflection showed to them the wisdom of committing their airy, though honest and ambitious, dreams to oblivion, and of deeming themselves what their father’s treachery had made them, to all appearance, nameless, and the first of their race, a position of which Julian was ere long to experience the full bitterness. For when with Kate, and she innocently referred to the protracted visit of Lord Hermitage at Kingsmuir—more than all, when she playfully and coquettishly mentioned his admiration of herself, she little knew how

Julian's heart was wrung ; and when his olive-tinted face grew pale, his dark eyes sparkled, and his lips quivered with the painful emotions of shame and degradation the name of Hermitage excited in his breast, she would pause with wonder, look at him with earnest and tender inquiry, and then coyly ask him to kiss and forgive her, if she had said aught that annoyed him. 'I would that he were gone, with all my heart, this Lord Hermitage, if his presence at our house annoys you,' said Kate ; 'your quarrel should be forgotten, and not prevent you from visiting us as usual. But why is he so distasteful to you ?'

'I cannot tell you,' said Julian, a little doggedly. 'I do not know.'

'But I do.'

'*You ?*' exclaimed he, aghast, as his colour fled.

'Yes, you are actually jealous of him.'

'Oh no, no, Kate ; such an idea never entered my head,' said Julian, greatly relieved to find that he had mistaken her meaning.

'It would be an absurd fear, indeed. He is old enough to be the father of us both ; and am I not to be your wife, Julian—your own pledged little wife ?'

And her engaging caresses soon brought back the bright fond smile to his face ; though her sweet countenance fell when he told her of all that Captain Melville had been so recently and sadly urging—the necessity for Gerard and himself leaving Fairy Knowe, for where they knew not yet, but to push their way in the world ; and Kate's eyes of dark violet-blue filled with tears as she listened to the recapitulation of a state of matters that, from the pinnacle on which wealth placed her, she could scarcely comprehend ; it seemed so strange that gentlemen should have to work—so odd that one should want money. But again she repeated the tender and engaging reassurance that she was his 'plighted wife,' and the heart of Julian thrilled with delight ; and as he held her face caressingly between his hands and gazed into the liquid depth of her dark-blue eyes, and on the sheen of her red-golden hair that glittered in the sunlight, he thought that no face in all the world could be more divine than that of his own Kate ; and they parted, his heart swelling with such

happiness that the vagueness of the future was forgotten. During the visit of Lord Hermitage, Julian had made various excuses to abstain from visiting Kingsmuir, but he hastened thither on learning that his lordship had gone to Deloraine, only to be told that no one was at home ; an answer so unusual in the country that it surprised him. But surprise became perplexity when he was told the same thing two or three times, and he thought—but it might be fancy—he detected a peculiar smile in the face of the valet who opened the door. Still more would Julian have been perplexed and troubled had he overheard some of the conversations in which, about this time, his name was referred to by Mrs. Kingsmuir, a lady who had been a noted beauty in her day, and was a thorough woman of the world ; and though all her daughters were well dowered, she was anxious that none but the most eligible parties should approach them. Severely handsome still, Mrs. Kingsmuir had a face that was lineless, cold, pale, and often imperious in expression. Selecting a time when she found Kate was alone, teaching a pet dog that Julian had given her to beg for pieces of biscuit, she began abruptly, ‘ Kate, to me it has become intensely tiresome and absurd, this affair of you and Julian Melville, and it must be ended—if Melville is indeed his name.’

‘ Mamma !’ exclaimed Kate, in a breathless voice, for never before had this tone been adopted, though on more than one occasion had she been rallied, especially by her sisters, about Julian.

‘ Your papa, too, says it must be ended ; he has ceased to be a boy, and you a school-girl ; moreover, he is a nobody—yea, less than a nobody, if all be true that Lord Hermitage has hinted.’

‘ Mamma !’ urged Kate again, in a breathless voice, while colouring deeply.

‘ There is some peculiar mystery about his birth. I never considered the matter before, but I do now.’

‘ Surely Captain Melville is a gentleman ?’

‘ That I grant you ; but *who* was the father of Julian and his brother Gerard ?’

‘ I never inquired, mamma,’ replied Kate, who felt on the verge of weeping.

‘Has he ever talked on the subject?’

‘He, mamma!’

‘This Julian,’ said Mrs. Kingsmuir, haughtily and impatiently.

‘No.’

‘He is wise, perhaps. Poor fellow! it is not his fault.’

‘What is *not* his fault?’

‘Much that I care not to enter upon with you.’

‘I always thought he was your especial favourite, mamma,’ said Kate, with her eyes full of tears.

‘As a young friend, certainly; but your name must not be coupled with his by the gossips of a country-side; thus, his visits here must cease, and I have given directions to that effect,’ she added, with a haughty wave of her white hand.

Kate’s countenance fell; she saw that in the matter of Julian’s birth there must be some mystery, for most sedulously had the name of his father been ever ignored. She thought it strange that the idea had never occurred to her before. She knew her parents’ extravagant pride of birth, of position, and their ever avowed high hopes concerning herself and her sisters, and she felt her heart die within her for a time.

‘Julian,’ resumed her mother, after a pause, during which she had been closely scanning her, ‘is a handsome and winning lad, I admit, but nameless, unknown, and, what is equally bad, penniless.’

‘Oh, mamma, Julian loves me!’ urged Kate, piteously.

‘Fiddlestick! He has only that to recommend him. No woman in her senses would ever tolerate a man who had only his love to offer; and this young fellow is little more than a boy.’

‘A minute ago you said he had ceased to be one.’

‘Love may be very fascinating, romantic, and all that—amid the dulness of the country especially—but it does not make the man, neither does it give him the requisites of birth, wealth, and position.’

‘But, mamma, surely it is a terrible thing to marry without love.’

‘Love alone will not do; and *who* is talking of marriage? Who thinks of it in connection with the poor or ignoble?’

'Ignoble! Oh, mamma, what a harsh word in this instance!' exclaimed Kate; and she thought, 'I shall certainly loathe this Lord Hermitage for aspersing Julian thus. What can he, a stranger, know about poor Julian or his family?'

Had she known the whole truth—the cruel mystery of the past—still more would she have loathed him at that moment, doubtless.

'You know, Kate—or rather, you will soon know, when a little older—that real happiness in this world is only to be found in keeping clear of all the follies and perplexities induced by that foolish passion concerning which you devour so much from Mudie's monthly box.'

'You mean love, mamma?'

'Of course.'

'Did you avoid it when you married papa?'

'That has nothing to do with the case; and your papa is a man of family and high position, though not a peer of the realm, as Lord Hermitage will soon be. And now let this matter end,' added Mrs. Kingsmuir, as she haughtily swept out of the room, rustling her stiff *moire antique* as she went.

'As Lord Hermitage will be,' thought the startled girl, as a new and stronger, but not unpleasant light suddenly broke upon her.

'I have spoken with our foolish Kate on *that* matter,' said Mrs. Kingsmuir, as she joined her husband, the Colonel, who was smoking a cigar in the conservatory for his own solace and the benefit of certain exotics; 'and so it is ended.'

'It is well—for it was a matter that was going too far.'

Poor Kate and Julian! their young love was thus coolly spoken of in the *past* tense.

'I even hinted of Lord Hermitage.'

'That was unwise.'

'Why?'

'I don't think Hermitage is much of a marrying man.'

'Why?' asked Mrs. Kingsmuir, curtly.

'Because,' replied the Colonel, while leisurely blowing concentric rings of smoke into the petals of an orchid, 'I heard him say the other day in the billiard-room, when quoting somebody—"Love is a lively romance, marriage is a flat history." A married man has nothing further to expect

but to sit down quietly and wait for death,' added the Colonel, laughing.

'It was very saucy of him to say such things in your hearing ; but he seems fond of Kate, certainly, and he has sown all his wild oats by this time.'

'I should think so, my dear,' said Colonel Kingsmuir, with a smile on his face, the general expression of which betokened candour, and truth in his deep hazel eyes, though he was an easy-going man, and led by his wife in all things.

'And,' continued Mrs. Kingsmuir, warming with a subject so congenial to her views, 'and got over all those faults which render a young man so ineligible for the marriage state.'

'Had I got over them when I married you, Kate ? Hermitage is a pleasant kind of fellow, but he has been dissipated and is up to his eyes in debt, I fear. Those Deloraine people always are.'

'But he will be a peer one of these days, and Kate must play her cards well on one hand, and on the other cease to have her name coupled with young Melville.'

'Of course. Ringan Jannock tells me that they are in the habit of meeting at the White Wicket near the belt of wood I planted for the deer.'

'Intolerable folly !'

Dazzled by the prospect of having a peer for a son-in-law, Mrs. Kingsmuir was never tired of consoling herself with the maxim, and impressing it also upon her husband, that a reformed rake always makes the best husband, and did so now emphatically.

'I must make but an indifferent one then,' replied the Colonel, laughing.

Soon after this, there came a day—Julian never forgot it—when Kate failed to meet him ; not that the event proved much, as she often failed to do so now. The evening was a lovely one ; the breeze was redolent of perfume ; though the season was so far advanced, the yellow and white butterflies were still flitting among the wayside flowers, the purple foxglove bells and the golden broom ; while aloft the birds were singing their last song as they winged their way home to tree and hedgerow. The familiar face and figure were not at the White Wicket, but against it there lounged the loutish

Ringan Jannock, who we have said was half a shepherd and wholly a poacher, who informed him, with a covert malevolence twinkling in his eyes, that the Colonel and all his family had gone on a visit to Deloraine. To linger were useless ; heartsick, with a sense of humiliation, that she was there, where *he* could never be, he turned him homeward, his soul convulsed with conflicting emotions and a foreboding of coming evil.

CHAPTER XIII.

VARIUM ET MUTABILE SEMPER FEMINA.

THE visit of the Colonel's family to Deloraine proved to be a somewhat protracted one, and drearily passed the weeks to Julian the while, in love-sick longing, as they gave him no sight of her he pined for. But, to his astonishment, he suddenly learned that the Kingsmuirs had returned and had been at home several days before he was aware of the circumstance. He resumed his visits to the White Wicket, at *the* usual hour daily, and lingered there, with a heart that beat anxiously and wearily, but his bright Kate came there no more. Illness did not detain her, for she was in perfect health he knew. Wherefore then did she avoid him ? Julian remembered, the last time he had called at the house of Kingsmuir, and been received by the lady thereof, how cold she had been to him, and that no servant had been rung for to show him out, a piece of rudeness of which he could not have believed one so punctilious would be guilty. The omission then seemed forgetfulness ; now it was beginning to have great significance, for Julian was fast becoming nervously susceptible of everything in the shape of slight. But what of Kate ? The trysting-place was there, and why came she not as usual ? Alas for the weakness, it may be the treachery, of which the human heart is capable ! The weeks spent amid the baronial splendour of Deloraine, with Mrs. Kingsmuir as a monitress and matchmaker, had not been without a dire and fatal effect on Kate. *Varium et mutabile semper femina !*

On one of those days when, with a heart sick and sad with alarm and disappointment, Julian turned away slowly and

reluctantly from the old familiar meeting-place, and was marvelling whether he might venture to call at Kingsmuir again, after having been told so repeatedly that 'no one was at home,' at the usual hour when they were wont to meet, Kate was seated in the garden with her great friend and chief gossip, Amy Kerr, of Kershope, and had forgotten all about it, at least, to all appearance. As she sat on a garden-seat, in a white dress, amid a flood of sunshine, a lovely picture she made, with her glorious hair, her soft complexion, and her deep blue eyes; yet her mind was full of thoughts that were the reverse of unworldly. She and Amy Kerr were making bouquets in mere idleness, of some of the last flowers of spring, for the summer glory of the garden had departed. The perfection of Scottish landscape gardening, one portion of it was ancient, with terraces partly paved and partly gravelled, with balustrades, flights of steps and grotesque stone figures, with a series of open lawns, having closely-clipped turf, the soil of which had been untouched since James VII. was king, intersected by tall hedges of holly and yew, and having rosaries and shrubs cut into the forms of peacocks, egg-cups, and vases; while the modern portion showed flower-beds, shrubbery, and ribbon-bordering that might have rivalled some portions of Kew. With a soft smile, Kate was plucking leaf by leaf a rose from the conservatory, and muttering to herself, with a soft smile on her face, 'He loves me—he loves me not,' etc., till the last one came, and she exclaimed aloud, '*Il m'aime passionnement!*'

Then Amy Kerr burst into a fit of laughter; a brown-haired, hazel-eyed, and graceful girl, she was as full of animation as Kate seemed now to be of pensive languor.

'I have been watching you,' she exclaimed. 'Oh, Kate, darling, how happy you must be, as Lord Hermitage comes back to-morrow.'

'Happy?'

'Yes, Kate—don't you love him?'

'Of course I must love him, Amy—under the circumstances.'

'I would that I were engaged,' said Amy thoughtfully; 'it must be a wonderful joy to be so.'

'Well, you will be one day, no doubt.'

'But how brilliant is yours, Kate—about to be a countess!'

‘Not yet—not just yet,’ replied the girl, with a bright, yet soft smile of gratification.

‘Well—you must be one when the old Earl dies.’

‘And what of it?’ asked Kate, as if coronets lay every day at her pretty feet.

‘You will be forgetting all your humble county friends then.’

‘Oh, Amy, how can you think so oddly, so meanly of me? But I know you only jest, and know me better than that comes to. Were I to be made Queen of Scotland—yes, or of Great Britain, I would never forget you and the pleasant joyous times we have had together.’

‘Or your promise?’

‘Of course.’

For Amy Kerr and Kate had exchanged promises to the effect that whichever was married first should have the other as her chief bridesmaid, and now Amy was looking forward with great delight to the time when she should act in that capacity.

‘Yes, Amy,’ said Kate dreamily, ‘together we shall share all the glories of the next London season.’

‘And Julian Melville,’ said Amy, after a pause; ‘what of him, eh?’

‘Poor fellow! don’t speak of him!’ replied Kate, colouring deeply.

‘But you must think of him,’ urged Amy.

‘Of course I do—that is, sometimes; but Julian is so young—and so poor.’

‘But you are not very old. How odd, that *both* should be called Julian! Well, Kate?’

‘Oh, Julian Melville will get over it in time—people have a way of getting over everything at last, I suppose.’ She remained silent for a time, but any regretful thoughts were stifled by the consciousness of Julian’s hopeless poverty, which had been duly impressed upon her by mamma, and by the rank and wealth that would be hers as the wife of Lord Deloraine, which her new lover would be in course of time. All her life had Kate been nursed in the lap of luxury—poverty she could not understand, save as some black and bitter thing to be avoided. Everything around her—the stately mansion-house, encrusted with coats-of-arms, the stately trees

in the chase, the familiar gardens—the old one with its stone terraces, and great sun and moon dial ; the new one with its carefully-tended flowers, shrubberies, and great marble fountain, all spoke to her of wealth—the power of gold ; so, dismissing the thought of Julian as unwelcome just then, she said, ‘ Did I tell you that Lord Hermitage is getting the family jewels reset at Edinburgh for me ? and mamma says the diamonds are really magnificent ! ’

Then followed some praises and views of the personal appearance and character of Lord Hermitage, and much more favourable they were than those formed of the same personage by the old nurse, Mysie, some twenty years before. So to this climax had matters come at last ! At forty years, the art of winning—an art that had long since become habit and second nature—had not left the *blasé* lord, and all ignorant of the close tie, the terrible relationship, that existed between him and her quondam lover, it is to be feared that the lovely little ear of Kate Kingsmuir had listened with but too much pleasure to all that his subtle tongue poured into it, while her vanity—fostered by her mother—was flattered by the prospect of being Lady of Hermitage, Countess of Deloraine, and mistress of more than one grand old Border castle of Scotland’s feudal and historic days, together with a noble mansion in Tyburnia. Yet times there were when in her secret heart, while her cheek crimsoned, she sighed to think of what Julian must feel when he heard of it all ; but how much more would she have blushed had she known all ! Lord Hermitage had said that he loved her ; had done so rapidly, plainly, and fluently. It was easy for him to say again that which he had said many times before to others. His society had speedily become pleasant to her, and she felt that she would miss him when he left Deloraine for London, where perhaps his affections might light upon some more brilliant object. That idea piqued, galled, and fretted her ; and he had, after singling her out from her sisters, surrounded her with such an atmosphere of admiration and adulation that she felt it would be impossible now to live out of it. And Lord Hermitage could, when he chose, be *so* suave to all ! Though he had been so furious—yea, brutally so—about the intervention of Julian at the otter-hunt, he gave

society the general impression of his being a man who was never put out about anything. Then he was always scrupulously well dressed ; the rude and sporting costume so prevalent in the present day he entirely ignored as 'bad form.'

So 'mamma's' plans and hopes had succeeded beyond her fondest anticipations, and Kate had returned to Kingsmuir the affianced wife of the heir of Deloraine ! The future ! What girl of her years and position ever did consider the future, or the chances of that vague time ? Of the years to come, or what her married career might be with such a mate as Lord Hermitage, she never thought at all—or if so, it was simply and gloriously of herself as a peeress, and one of the queens of 'society' ! Colonel Kingsmuir, in addition to a noble landed estate, had realised a princely fortune in India, and could portion his daughters, Kate, Ermentrude, and merry little Muriella, more than well. Kate was beautiful, a lady in rank, had a plentiful dower, and the old, ailing Earl, whom we last saw fretting querulously alone in the old draughty dining-hall, was quite satisfied in a monetary point of view ; so was my Lord Hermitage, and the whole affair was as good as *un fait accompli*. Both congratulated themselves on the fact that Kate's dower would brighten all gloomy old Deloraine from its battlements to those darksome dungeons where, in past times, Englishmen had been kept in hundreds under bolt and bar, until ransomed or exchanged according to the 'Leges Marchiarum,' or old Laws of the Borders.

'Lady of Hermitage, Countess of Deloraine—how nice they sound, and how strange it will all be ! But poor Julian !' thought, almost said Kate, who amid her ambitious exaltation could not but feel some shame and compunction, together with a dread of meeting Julian and having any explanation with him ; yet it came to pass anon !

CHAPTER XIV.

'I WILL FORGET HER.'

'JULIAN !'

'Kate !'

For some time past, the former had ceased to hope of meeting the latter, though usually pretty familiar with her

movements, but on this day they had met suddenly in a narrow green lane near the orchard of Kingsmuir House. At last they were face to face, these two, and each took the hand of the other, but mechanically it seemed, and no kiss, no caress, was offered by Julian, or invited by the manner of Kate. Each seemed to feel intuitively that an unnatural gulf had somehow yawned between them; but Julian had yet to learn what the startling nature of it was. Face to face with Julian after all! Was it shame, or the shade thrown on her lovely cheek by the sunshine and her pink parasol that lent it a deeper crimson, till it paled away under the searching and upbraiding eye of Julian. Fear of her mother and the influence of Lord Hermitage were, however, alike forgotten for a time, and much—though not all of her old love (she had schooled herself too well for that!)—swelled up in the palpitating bosom of the beautiful sensationalist, for Kate had much of that in her character.

'Oh, why have you avoided me—why ceased to meet me?' asked Julian, and the tone of his voice certainly stirred her heart.

'Blame not me—but mamma,' she replied, looking down, for beneath his eyes hers quailed, yet despite the schooling referred to, she now longed to fling her arms round him and seek his kisses as of old; but aware of the part that she had to play, and the explanation she had to make, she controlled herself, and, by acting on the other extreme, seemed almost repellant.

'I do not understand all this,' said Julian, in a broken voice; 'have you nothing to say to me?'

'Yes—but how shall I say it?'

'Let your own heart dictate.'

'Well, Julian, I must be free.'

'Free?'

'From my engagement to—to you.'

'Be it so—you shall be free if you desire it,' he replied through his clenched teeth; 'but what have I done to be cast off thus?'

'Nothing—I know—nothing,' replied Kate, with difficulty restraining her tears, and averting her quivering face.

For some seconds there was a silence so deep that they

seemed to hear the beating of their hearts, and Julian was eyeing her gloomily and sorrowfully. Dazzled though she was by the future held out as the wife of one who would be ultimately a peer, her heart was naturally too kind not to be wrung by a knowledge of the pain to be inflicted upon poor loving Julian. She felt that she had a painful and cruel story to tell, and had planned again and again how it was to be told, if they met—or whether it should be in writing—and now the time had come!

‘Do place your dear hand once again in mine,’ pleaded Julian, with inexpressible tenderness.

Kate drew the kid glove off her right hand and placed it in his. As she did so, on her engaged finger there flashed a magnificent diamond ring, while *another* treasured ring which he had placed on the same finger was no longer there.

‘When did you get this jewel?’ he asked, in a changed tone.

‘Yesterday.’

‘From *whom*, Kate?’

‘Mamma placed it on my finger,’ replied Kate, evasively; but little did Julian know that the same diamond had last glittered on the finger of his unhappy mother! Kate trembled excessively, for she felt the moment most critical, and snatching her hand from him, she covered her face, and in a few hasty words, told him—all!

Julian seemed turned to stone—crushed—at a revelation so startling—at this announcement of a rivalry so utterly beyond all his calculations. The bright sunshine seemed cruel and mocking as it streamed between the branches of the old trees that shaded the hedgerows, and as it danced so merrily on the rich clover-fields beyond.

‘Deserted, and for—*him*!’ said Julian, aloud, but to himself rather than her, and his words seemed to cleave the voiceless stillness of the old green lane. For a time something closely akin to despair came with a stony expression into his clearly cut and handsome young face. He had been prepared for much, but not for *this*, and even Kate was struck by the terrible effect her words had upon him, and thought in her heart, ‘Poor Julian—how much he must love me!’

What he said, for a time he scarcely knew. Love that is

true, deep, and passionate—love that is constant and pure, is never fluent, whatever novelists and poets may say ; so much that Julian had to urge was made up of incoherences and long pauses, till he realised their mutual position, and he became calmer.

'To love you, Kate, as I have done,' said he, 'was a great madness—a great selfishness in me, no doubt. *He*—that man, I mean, has so much to offer ; I so little—nothing ; yet to behold you, whom I love, the wife of him—that man of horror—horror at least to me—oh, great God, it is too much—too much !' groaned Julian, in a very broken voice.

'Why have you such a horror of Lord Hermitage ?'

'That I cannot tell you.'

'Some one else will love you in the time to come, dear Julian,' said Kate, gently laying her white hand on his arm.

'Dear Julian !' he repeated, scornfully ; 'I do not wish for any one to love me.'

'Why ?'

'Because I have lost all trust in humanity.'

'Some one *will* love you though,' she urged, with a sickly smile.

'And be false, and fickle, and selfish, as you are now !'

'Oh, Julian—mamma——' she paused, and her whole face quivered again with mental pain to see him so affected ; 'in all this matter I am not my own mistress.'

'Kate !' he exclaimed, and pressed her soft hand in his, only to fling it from him with a moan, and then to catch it and fondle it again ; 'how can you tell me all this so coldly—that we are never to meet again? *Never*? Do you know all that word means—never to meet more, to hear your voice, to clasp your hand as I do now ; never to kiss you as of old ? Oh, Kate, my darling !'

'Julian ! Julian !' she exclaimed, with a great burst of heavy weeping, 'I feel myself to be the most false and wicked girl in the world.'

'Do you deem it right, Kate, to marry one man while, if there be any truth in your tears and agitation, your heart is so evidently in the keeping of another ?'

'No, I do not,' replied Kate, but with evident hesitation.

'Can it be right to act out a lie ?'

‘But you are not yet a man, Julian,’ urged Kate, compelled to stand a little on her defence: ‘nor can you be deemed so till twenty-one, mamma says, and then—and then——’

‘What then; that I am poor?’

‘There is something more than that, Julian.’

‘Something worse than poverty?’

‘Yes; they tell me—mamma told me, that—that—the Lord Hermitage—oh, do pardon me,’ she continued, with a fresh burst of weeping, while turning red and white, and hot and cold by turns.

‘That the Lord Hermitage, *what?*’ asked Julian, fiercely.

‘Told her that your family is obscure—under a cloud or something, what I know not, and so—and so—mamma would never, never consent to our marriage, even had you a fortune.’

‘And this man Hermitage was your mother’s informant?’

‘I fear so; indeed I am sure of it.’

‘He suspects us then?’

‘Perhaps so; I do not know.’

She was drowned in tears, and Julian, pale as death, regarded her steadily. Could it actually be, that this man who had been the destroyer of Gladys Melville, was to be the first to defame their children? Julian raised his eyes and hands to heaven, but the bitter curse he felt in his heart died unuttered on his now pallid lips.

‘Julian Melville,’ said the voice of a third person, who came suddenly upon the scene—Colonel Kingsmuir, whose usually serene and pleasant face wore a haughty and highly provoked expression—‘this folly of yours and of my daughter has been permitted to go much too far, and under existing circumstances—nay, under any circumstances whatever, must cease, now and for all! I forbid you both to meet again. Ere long she is to find another guardian even than I, and it will be at your peril either to follow, molest, or write to her. But I, know you to be too much of a gentleman, Julian, to attempt anything of the kind, and we have the pleasure of now and finally,’ he repeated, with extreme significance, ‘*finally* bidding you good morning.’

And drawing Kate’s arm through his, he led her away, while Julian mechanically lifted his hat, and, as one in a

dream, walked away in the other direction, a prey to more bitterness and humiliation than he could ever feel in this world again, for some emotions are too keen and terrible to be felt more than once in their intensity.

But the moment Kate and her father were out of sight and he felt himself alone, his faltering steps began to linger, and he often paused and looked vacantly around him, while with dull and strange calmness he began to go over all the recent scene or interview again, till he remembered it in all its details, and felt that he was bidding farewell for ever to the delicious romance of his youth. As he stood still and looked at the blue sky above him, and the fast flying fleecy clouds coming in succession over the summits of the green hills, of what was the ardent Julian thinking? Of the long, dull, barren, and loveless years that were from that fatal hour before him—years in which he must learn to forget Kate Kingsmuir, as if she had never existed, or to think of her only as the wife of another; and *who* was that other? Long and barren years and forgetfulness to be attained! Poor lad! in his poetic ardour he forgot that he was barely twenty yet! He lingered for hours among the hills, fearing that if he went home just then, the expression of his face might scare his brother Gerard, or their old and now ailing kinsman, the only one they could claim or love in this world. Could it be that the soft little hand he had clasped so often, and that ever sought his so confidingly, was to be another's now? That another was listening to the tones of love that had so often melted in his ear, and that the heart that had so often throbbed against his own should beat for him no more?

'Duped, deluded, doubly dishonoured!' he muttered fiercely, 'the victim of a father's perfidy and a false girl's ambitious pride—for there was falseness in the ring of all she had to say to-day!'

But a few weeks ago, when all the uplands were bright with the golden harvest, and the voices of the reapers came on the breeze across the level lea; when the leaves were yet green in Ettrick woods, and the deep glens between the great hills were covered with the richest grass, and every garden was gay with the flowers of a sweet autumn, how happy he had been! Now the fields were covered with

rotten stubble, or were being fallowed under the plough, and the leaves of the stripped forest were dank and decaying under foot. The glory had gone from the scenery, as gladness from the heart of Julian, and all his world looked dark and dreary. All the hopes and anticipations of the future, with all the joy of the present, that made life seem so sweet but a few weeks ago, had been ruthlessly swept away. Lest he might provoke in the gentle old man a righteous but dangerous outburst of wrath, Julian dared not tell Captain Melville *all* that Kate had told him, or hint at still more that was left unsaid, but he made a full confidant of the sympathetic Gerard.

'Strange that he should be your present evil genius,' said the latter.

'He destroyed our mother's life,' said Julian; 'he robbed us of our inheritance, even of our very name, and now he robs me of Kate, my love, my promised wife! Oh, may the God who hears me——'

'Hush, Julian!' exclaimed Gerard, scared by his brother's fury, and placing a hand on his mouth; 'do not curse him—do not curse him!'

'Why?'

'That would be too terrible! Remember!'

'What have I to remember, Gerard?'

'That our mother never did so, and that she loved him while life lasted.'

'True,' replied Julian, wearily, as he sank into a chair overcome by the whole emotions of the day; 'but why are such men as this lord spared by heaven?'

'Perhaps because they are seldom prepared to die.'

'And as for Kate, I must now teach myself a new task; I will forget her!'

'You are right and wise, dear Julian.'

And so he thought, but vainly, for long, in the words of Tennyson:

'I will forget her! All dear recollections,
Pressed in my heart like flowers within a book,
Shall be torn out and scattered to the winds;
I will forget her!'

But Julian, though less an enthusiast and dreamer than

his brother Gerard, suffered keenly in the double shock his pride of heart had sustained, for truly, as Scott has it, 'the most cruel wounds are those which make no outward show.'

CHAPTER XV.

MARRIED.

JULIAN'S resolution proved weaker than his words, for slowly, terribly, and bitterly dragged the aimless days now, and every hour thereof. The clocks as usual indicated the hour when he was wont to hasten to the trysting-place, whither now she came no more. It was there unchanged ; in his mind's eye, he saw it with all its details, though never again should he go near it ; while her words, ' I am your plighted wife, Julian '—a promise so quickly forgotten—recurred to him again and again with unceasing pertinacity and unceasing bitterness. Almost daily he had to pass places that were associated with Kate—consecrated to her, as it were, by the superstition of his heart ! In this stream that brawled over its brown stony bed, between the golden bells of the gorse-bushes, they had fished together in their school-days ; here they had gathered flowers, the blue-bell, the fox-glove, and the guelder rose ; there ferns of wonderful patterns ; and up that steep cliff, ' with lichens grey,' he had boldly clambered to get her eggs from an eagle's nest. There they had sat side by side and sketched the old ruined tower upon its steep scarped rock, and here they had done little bits of foliage—old trees of Ettrick Forest, with the warm sunshine on their gnarled stems ; in that dell they had wandered hand in hand in many a red-glowing eventide and many a lovely summer morn, meeting stealthily or otherwise, where never more would they wander again ; and with all his love of home, he had now only a fierce and intense longing to turn his back upon all these places for ever.

But the time was to come sooner than even he in all his ardour and impatience anticipated. It was good for him that sometimes his young heart filled with anger.

'She is as worthless of the pain and jealousy I feel, as of the love I have wasted on her,' he would mutter. 'If her parents had coerced her, I could have forgiven her ; but she

is heartless, faithless, base, and disloyal; and yet she is so beautiful, so winning!' he added, as his boyish tears fell bitterly over his hot cheeks. 'Oh, Kate, Kate! how shall I be able to live through all the years that are left to me after this!'

But Julian forgot, as we have said before, that he was barely twenty, and that at twenty we have a good many years in general—years wherein to forget many things.

'I should leave this and at once for anywhere, Gerard,' said he, as he sat with his brother smoking in the garden, breaking a long silence, 'but it would cost me much pain to leave you, dear fellow, and poor old grandfather, now that he has begun to ail so much of late.'

'We cannot be all ever together,' said Gerard, thoughtfully; 'and as for this late cross of yours, you will get over it, and perhaps may hate her in time.'

'I—oh no, no—I love her too truly even now, to have one thought against Kate.'

'That I grant you; but I am speaking of the future—not the present time.'

'Indifference may—nay, I hope will—come, but not hate.'

'Well, perhaps it was too strong a term—but she might have omitted her sneer at our birth.'

'She did not sneer, Gerard; it seemed to load her tongue, or her heart, and I half wrung the admission that she had been cruelly and partially enlightened, from her. Powerful indeed must have been the influences brought to bear upon her ere she was schooled to break so coolly and so cruelly with me.'

'In this I fear that at times you flatter yourself too much. Had she really loved you, dear Julian, as a girl of eighteen usually loves, with all the first ardour of her heart and soul,' said Gerard, who in his gentleness and loving nature often spoke to his twin-brother as a sister might have done, 'she would never have been tempted away from you.'

'Anyway, I must cease to speak of all this, even to you, Gerard.'

'Right,' exclaimed Gerard, refilling his cherished briar-root pipe, 'we have other things to think of; besides, Julian, the sufferings of the jilted are too apt to create ridicule.'

'Ridicule!' repeated Julian, starting as if a wasp had stung him.

'Come now, dear boy,' said Gerard, placing an arm caressingly on his neck, 'we two may soon be alone in the world, and we must remember that human life is too short for passions so keen and bitter as these; the world is all before you, Julian, as it is before me; let us make a future for ourselves—yea, a name; better even than that of which we have been deprived—while the dead bury their dead!'

Then he added, with a laugh—'We must speak of this fickle Kate no more, and do you take heart, dear Julian, and think:

"If she be not fair to me,
What care I how fair she be?"

so says the old song.'

'Gerard, you have never been in love,' said Julian, in a reproachful tone.

'But my time, no doubt, will come,' said Gerard, sucking complacently at his briar-root.

True, Gerard—the time of a love was coming—a love you were never to forget, so full was it of features—dark, mysterious, and unheard of before.

Captain Melville had experienced a severe shock by the advent of Lord Hermitage's appearance in the district, but he was in such feeble health now that he never left his cottage; and most sedulously did his affectionate grandsons keep from him all knowledge of the approaching event at Kingsmuir (where the preparations for Kate's marriage went forward without delay), lest it should recall too bitterly and too vividly their dead mother's wrongs; and could he have known all the darker features of the story—how Lord Hermitage had been the first to cast, in the Colonel's household, a stigma on the birth of Julian, he might, in his feeble, futile rage, have gone mad outright! Gerard, farther-sighted and more reflective than Julian, had always deemed the love affair of the latter a useless and hopeless one—and one fated to end just as it had done, but not with such a rival, and, moreover, with a stigma, greater than poverty, put upon them. That the marriage of the heir of Deloraine was not to be an event long delayed, soon became evident from the

preparations therefor, at the mansion of Kingsmuir, by journeys to Edinburgh, interviews with lawyers, the arrival of *modistes* and tradespeople of all kinds. The church that Knox founded being deemed too vulgar now for the Scottish aristocracy, the marriage was celebrated in a little Scoto-Episcopal chapel built on the estate of Kingsmuir, where a curate officiated from time to time, and where Kate and her sisters had been wont to attend at the harmonium. And on that day—the most eventful in a woman's life—lovely indeed did Kate look, with her bridal veil over her glorious red-golden hair, and her white silk dress gleaming in its richness of texture, so different from all the surroundings of poor Gladys in the legal den of Uriah Grippie. As she knelt beside her 'noble bridegroom' and heard the nuptial benediction given, had she any thought of Julian Melville? We fear not; and yet he was prominently connected with a curious episode that occurred. When the bridal ring was required, at the most important part of the solemn ceremony, where was it? It was not in either of the vest pockets of Lord Hermitage, who searched therein for it again and again, and yet he could have sworn that he had carefully brought it with him wrapped in a little piece of tissue paper. Could he have left it on his dressing-table? Anyway it was not forthcoming when most necessary, and certainly he looked as much put out as it was possible for one of his *blasé* temperament to be. To detain the ceremony while a messenger was sent to Kingsmuir and a search instituted there, was not to be thought of, so what was to be done? From among the baubles at her gold *châtelaine*, Amy Kerr suddenly produced a marriage ring, which fitted exactly the fairy finger of Kate, and with this substitute the service proceeded to its close, and the bride was led away on the arm of her exultant spouse to where the carriages were in waiting.

'How came *you* by a wedding-ring, Amy?' asked Mrs. Kingsmuir, turning with haughty surprise to the blushing bridesmaid, as she rustled in white brocaded silk, with lappets of fine lace floating from her beautiful hair, for she was still a handsome woman; 'it is the strangest thing in the world, child!'

'I got it from Kate,' replied Amy.

‘From Kate ! and how came she to have it ?’

‘Julian,’ began Amy, in a low and hesitating voice—‘Julian Melville once placed it on her finger, half in play and half seriously, I suppose, and it remained there long unknown to us all. She gave it to me to return to him on the first opportunity, and especially to place it in his own hand.’

‘Why ?’

‘Because it was his mother’s ring.’

‘Her *wedding* ring ?’ asked Mrs. Kingsmuir, in a marked tone.

‘Yes,’ replied Amy.

‘*His* mother’s ring !’ exclaimed Lord Hermitage, when this part of the story eventually reached him, causing him to change colour visibly. ‘There is some accursed *fate* in this !’ he muttered under his breath ; and though not naturally superstitious, he had a fear he knew not of what.

‘Married with another woman’s ring !’ said the mother of Amy Kerr, who was not without many old-fashioned prejudices ; ‘I don’t much like the idea.’

‘Why ?’ asked Mrs. Kingsmuir.

‘It is unlucky.’

‘How so ?’

‘I don’t know ; but a dead woman’s ring, more than all.’

‘And young Melville’s mother is said to have died—died—well, under a cloud,’ said the other matron, in a low voice.

‘It matters not,’ said Lord Hermitage, who only heard the first remark ; ‘I shall find the right ring when we return, Kate.’

But he never found it, so Kate was obliged to content herself with the wedding-ring of the ill-fated Gladys. Even had her own been found, she would not have deemed it consecrated, as it had not been used in the nuptial service.

‘Bother the ring !’ exclaimed the unsentimental bridegroom ; ‘don’t mind it, darling,’ he added, as they drove away, followed by old slippers and rice, while she laid her sweet soft face on his breast ; and as he covered it with impassioned kisses, he could not help reflecting how fair and young she looked, and that he was more than twenty years her senior.

So the bridal was over at Kingsmuir ; but it continued to be a nine days’ wonder in the secluded district of Ettrick,

where the people were never weary of expatiating on the youth and beauty of Kate, and hoping that her husband would prove worthy of such a bride, for, sooth to say, there were many who had grave doubts on the subject ; but there was a vast amount of congratulatory visiting, and driving and riding to and fro all over the county. Kate married ! Julian knew beyond all human doubt that Kate—the girl he loved so fondly, and who had jilted him so cruelly—now was utterly lost to him and for ever, as completely as if the grave had swallowed her up. Whether the agencies at work had been home influence, family persecution (which he barely deemed possible), or ambition and the selfishness that reign in so many hearts, it was worse than useless to canvass or consider now, and wisdom suggested that the sooner he forgot her the better for himself ; but he was not likely to do so while he remained in Ettrick Forest. Desirous now of blotting out the memory of the past—the memory of all that had ever been connected with her—he destroyed every letter, note, book, and lock of hair he had ever received from her ; and, lest he might be tempted to look upon it from time to time, her photo, a beautifully-tinted and life-like miniature, he also cast into the flames. Then he made a mad rush to save it. Why ? Because he was unstable of purpose. Luckily he was too late ; the fair, false face shrivelled up and turned to ashes under his eyes.

‘It is as well,’ said Gerard grimly.

And Julian’s sore heart echoed the sentiment ; but the sad expression of his handsome young face, reckless and dreary, haunted Gerard for many a day after they had other griefs, and when these two, who loved each other so well, were far, far apart. Julian was silent. A great sorrow is too deep for words ; the heart knoweth its own bitterness.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE TWO FUNERALS.

WHILE feasting and rejoicing brightened and made all glad at the stately mansion of Kingsmuir, while village bells rang by day, and bonfires blazed by night, and flags waved gaily from triumphal arches, sorrow was fast darkening in the humble

home of the Melvilles at Fairy Knowe. A general debility or decline of the whole system—for he was older with mental ‘worry’ than with years—had fallen on Captain Melville, and it soon became evident that the end was not far off, yet his clear, calm eyes looked upward and showed no sign of fear. Ere long he was confined to his chamber, then his chair, and anon, his bed, beside which Gerard was wont to sit and read his old Bible to him, seeking those passages of promise which the old man could not but love to hear, and hear hopefully.

In the past time he had but to endure the wrongs under which his only child had writhed and perished. He could remember the days when an old officer’s advice to his son had always been ‘be ever ready with your pistol,’ and the latter was the arbiter in every quarrel. But now he belonged to an age ‘in which injuries are taken very quietly, unless they are wrongs which the law affects to redress—wounds which can be healed by a golden plaister in the way of damages—the age of duelling (like that of chivalry) is past.’

‘Your future, my boys,’ said he more than once, ‘is, I think, the chief trouble that is wearing me out before my time.’

‘Fear not for us, grandfather,’ they both would say confidently and simultaneously, while the old man would wipe his eyes, finger his coverlet nervously, and seem to grope in darkness.

‘He is breaking fast and sadly, poor dear old man,’ whispered Gerard, as they watched him ; ‘a little time, Julian, and we shall stand alone in the world.’

His face looked painfully thin and wan, and in the intervals of returning consciousness, he gazed alternately at the dark-complexioned Julian and the fair-haired Gerard with a sad and bewildered expression of eye ; but the nearer we approach death, the lighter seem the sorrows of the dying—the heavier and more dubious those of the living, the young, and those likely to live long. ‘There are some feelings,’ says the talented authoress of ‘Fenton’s Quest,’ ‘that seem to wear out as man grows older—affections that grow paler day by day, like colours fading in the sun.’ But the old man’s love for his dead daughter and for her two wronged sons never wore out, weakened, or faded, and in the confusion of time and place he sometimes thought she was by his side.

'Gladys—Gladys,' he would say, 'no—it is you, Gerard—you are so like her, my dear fellow—and my poor memory is not what it used to be.'

By field and flood the old soldier had faced death too often to fear it now; he had quietly heard the announcement of the doctor that he could not last long, and if it cost him a pang, it was because of those he was leaving behind. He had always known, of course, that a time must inexorably come when the cloud of death would gather before his failing sight, and the grave must claim its own; that it might be to-morrow or years hence. The intervening years had passed, and *now* the time was at hand closer than he thought, 'when the dust shall return to the earth whence it came, and the spirit return to God,' so he passed peacefully away in his sleep, with a smile on his face, even as Gladys had done. The season was one of gloom that rendered the calamity at Fairy Knowe gloomier still—if aught can render death so. Howling drearily among the leafless trees, the bitter north wind swept along the mountain sides, and moaned in the desolate glens, where now the waters of the streams were arrested and frozen by the icy hand of winter. To the two now lonely brothers the funeral passed like a portion of a grim fantastic dream—the grave that gaped for its prey beside that of their mother Gladys, the bustle of mattocks and spades, the coffin that contained the only relation they could claim in the world, the battening down of sods, the dreary prayer 'emitted' by the Rev. Ichabod Slab, the minister of the parish, and the last solemn closing scene continued to float before them long after it was all over. When in life, the Captain had often thought that, when this time came, he would fain have had three volleys fired over, and the 'Point of War' beaten beside, his grave. As it was, he had desired that his old regimental sword and Bible should be placed upon his coffin lid, and this was done by order of Julian. Lord Hermitage, then on his second wedding tour, had heard somehow of the Captain's illness, and his sole and selfish hope was that he might die without telling to others the dark tale of treachery which had been already told to those most concerned therein—Julian and Gerard. When death was drawing near, the old Captain's pride and sense of just indignation passed out

of his heart, and privately, and all unknown to them, he wrote in a tremulous and failing hand to Lord Hermitage, telling him of the existence of his sons—the sons of the dead and deluded Gladys, and praying him, as he hoped God would pardon him when lying face to face with death, as *he* now lay, to do them justice, or attend to their welfare in life, at least so far as lads of such spirit might brook or permit—imploring him as only a dying man could do. This letter my Lord Hermitage read, with an unmoved countenance and an unstirred heart, as he lounged with his back to the fire in his palatial club in Pall Mall. To acknowledge such close relations, and in the height of his honeymoon, too, was not to be thought of.

‘What the deuce can the stupid old duffer think or mean in writing thus to me, and at such a time?’ muttered his lordship, as he crushed up the letter just as he had done the marriage certificate at Wiesbaden—and tossed it into the flames.

Of this last little episode in his life his sons were totally ignorant. Cards of ‘condolence’ came pouring in by post at Fairy Knowe; among others, from Colonel and Mrs. Kingsmuir, which Gerard threw into the fire.

‘We should have had similar pieces of pasteboard from Lord and Lady Hermitage,’ said Julian, bitterly.

But no heart ever dwells on its own bitterness for ever, and the time for action was fast coming to the two brothers. The public prints had duly informed Mr. Uriah Grippie, solicitor-at-law, of the demise of the old Captain, the mark of whose cane, wielded by an unsparing hand, remained—and would till his dying day remain—on his legal visage; and the obituary notice gave him a species of start, while he glanced at the inevitable box containing the proofs—proofs that had been quietly accumulating—of the marriage of Lord Hermitage with the dead man’s daughter. It was too late now to turn these documents to more account or profit than he had already done. He knew not, as yet, that Gladys had left sons, who might dispute the succession to title and estates; yet he did not destroy the proofs—as a lawyer never *does* destroy any paper that may be productive of profit or mischief, or that does not in any way inculcate himself; so

thus they remained, amid the dust and obscurity of their usual receptacle. On the same day that saw the turf battened over the grave of Captain Melville, a grander funeral cortège than his issued from the gate or the embattled arch of Deloraine Castle, and a hatchment was hanging where erst the deadly *panier de morte* was wont to swing of old. William, Earl of Deloraine, was being gathered to his fathers. Though a passably respectable peer, he had been in his lifetime about as useful to the kingdom of Scotland or the empire of Great Britain as a barber's block. He had no more idea of politics or of patriotism than his ancestor, the first peer of 1706; he had, however, kept a racing stud and won the gold cup at the nearest races annually; but nothing more had he done, for good perhaps, in this world; and now he was about to be deposited in the black stone vault known as the 'Deloraine aisle' of the parish kirk, in ghostly pomp, like his predecessors. William of Deloraine, who rode to Melrose in his mail at the behest of the Lady of Buccleuch, had been buried with bell, book, and candle, but on this occasion Colonel Kingsmuir's chaplain officiated. A highflying Scottish ritualist, he would fain have buried the poor old Earl with candle, bell, and book too, but Mrs. Kingsmuir was averse 'to such vagaries,' and would have preferred the dreary ministrations of Mr. Ichabod Slab.

'It was a doocid bore,' Lord Hermitage thought, to come back to the gloomy old fortalice of the middle ages, from his jolly marriage trip with his girl-wife, to bury an old man he cared nothing about; and, also, Mrs. Kingsmuir thought it a profound bore to put the whole family and household, from the butler to the buttons, into mourning, just when the Edinburgh 'season' was at hand; but Kate was now Countess of Deloraine, and there was balm in that.

The old Earl was dead, and, cased in ever so many coffins, was borne on the shoulders of eight bare-headed and stalwart-limbed serving-men, all clad in the Deloraine livery, *azure* and *gules*, and laid by them where others of his line lay, on their stone biers, silent and desolate, neglected and alone, their blazoned coffins recording that 'the high and puissant Earls of Deloraine' were there, their crimson adornments mouldered and faded. On some lay a rusted sword, and on

nearly all a real coronet ; and the mourners were glad to hasten from that place of gloom out into the light, clear sunshine, where the merry birds were twittering among the dark green ivy and the carved buttresses of the ancient church. Designed by the Lord Lyon King-of-Arms, a gorgeous hatchment hung above the castle gate—a shield, *or*, with a bend *azure*, crested by a stag and coronet, supported by two maidens in antique habits, *azure* and *gules*; the arms of Deloraine, but, in the fashion peculiar to Scotland, France, and Germany, surrounded by the sixteen quarters of nobility or descent ; whereas in England no more than one coat is ever shown—that of the defunct, which may be acquired by purchase. The old Earl was soon forgotten ; but this pretentious piece of vanity hung above his castle gate till frittered and worn to rags by the rain and wind, after which it was placed in the aisle where he lay.

We have said that the time for action on the part of Julian and Gerard was at hand, when they must ‘cast about’ and set forth to seek their fortunes in the world.

CHAPTER XVII.

FORTH INTO THE WORLD.

WITH all his foresight, care, and anxiety for the future of the two who depended upon him, either the old Captain had miscalculated his means, or—and this was much more likely—his ‘doers’ (as the Scotch truly, but with unintentional irony, term their legal advisers), Messrs. Deeds and Grasper, Writers to Her Majesty’s Signet, Edinburgh, made a profitable muddle of them, as the monkey did with the disputed cheese. It was the old story over again, and thus, when debts were paid and all settled, but a couple of hundreds each accrued to Julian and Gerard, and with these they were left to push their fortune in the world. Even to them, young and ardent as they were, the result of this inquisition into their monetary affairs was crushing and disappointing—yea, most terribly so for a time.

‘The dear old man !’ said Gerard ; ‘we must not upbraid him, for he would have left us the value of the National Debt, had it been his to leave. Our days of dreamy idleness at Fairy Knowe are past, and the time for action has come.’

‘For action?’ asked Julian. ‘In what fashion, Gerard?’

‘To solve our family mystery, if there can be a solution of it, and to make a name for ourselves if we can, beyond even that our false father should have given us. When fellows are left with so little as you and I—such slender means of living—we must work to earn more.’

‘True; but at what?’ asked Julian.

‘God knows! I may try literature, and think I shall.’

‘A dubious resource, even now.’

‘“A good walking-stick, but a bad crutch,” as Sir Walter Scott used to say. But, bah! I shall not live long enough to require a crutch, I hope. And you, Julian?’

‘Soldiering, I fear, it may come to.’

‘Fear! You?’

‘Yes; in a humble form, I mean.’

Gerard sighed, while the other laughed bitterly.

‘Let us look London-wards,’ said Gerard, cheerfully; ‘there is no place in the world like London for getting on.’

‘If one has friends.’

‘And if not?’

‘Then there is no place in the world where one may more easily starve!’ said Julian, gloomily; but just then he was rather disposed to take a shady view of everything. ‘Oh, Gerard,’ he added, ‘is life really worth the trouble it costs us?’

‘Yes, and more. Don’t talk that way, dearest Julian.’

‘Think what it cost our mother, and left us——’

‘The task of avenging her, perhaps—who knows!’ interrupted Gerard, with a flash in his eyes.

Neither of the brothers, of course, knew aught of law; but they knew enough of the Scotch law of marriage to be aware that it was formed—loosely as some folks may deem it—pre-eminently for the protection of women from the snares of the other sex, who may as well play with fire as with matrimony north of the Tweed; and that if proofs could be found, traced or adduced, of the marriage performed by Uriah Grippie, it lay with them to find and produce them; but so completely had Captain Melville impressed upon them the conviction that any documentary evidence had been destroyed, and that Grippie was as inscrutable as a sphynx, and hostile as

the devil himself, that they never thought of applying to him ; and Julian had vague ideas of trusting to fate, while Gerard had equally vague ideas of prosecuting some inquiries in the city of Wiesbaden, the scene of his mother's desertion and bitterest grief. They both had that bright, if airy, inheritance in the future, which is the property of the young and ardent, together with the glow of hope, that glorious incentive to present action and future success : thus, so truly does Pope tell us that—

‘ Hope springs eternal in the human breast.’

The brothers, proud by nature and loving well to stand high in estimation of all around them, were nervously watchful and in dread lest the sad story of their luckless mother should become known in the place where it had been so sedulously kept from all ; and in their sensitiveness they would rather have gone to the most remote quarter of the habitable globe—yea, to where Stanley has been, among cannibals, dwarfs, and the land of poisoned arrows ; yet the mysterious story, or many variations of it, did ‘ get wind,’ as the phrase is. The world is a small place, and Scotland is smaller still, so the vicinity of Ettrick is very small indeed ; and Ringan Jannock, on the authority of scraps heard in the servants’ hall at Kingsmuir, became somewhat of an authority on the subject at the smith’s shop and ale-house in the village close by, and the name of poor Gladys elicited many an un-Christian surmise, and many a coarse, malicious laugh, of which, fortunately for themselves, her sons were ignorant, though they knew well, by the remarks that had fallen from Kate, that her family had received a certain amount of enlightenment, and it made them in haste to turn their backs upon the home of their boyhood and all who knew them there.

On the day before they were to leave home—the last they were to spend under what had been from infancy their own and only roof-tree—the brothers paid a visit to the humble and secluded churchyard where were the graves of their kin, covered by a simple slab, inscribed to the memory of ‘ Captain Gerard Melville, of the Royal Scots Fusiliers, and Gladys his daughter.’

Nothing more—what more could they put ? And with

swollen hearts they each kissed the cold stone—their last poor tribute of affection to those who lay mouldering below.

The past years with their love, affection, and sorrow, the present with its humiliation and poverty, the future with its too probable doubts, troubles, and separation, were all now keenly before them, as hand in hand, like boys, they stood beside the graves they never more might see. The thoughts of both were the same, yet they made no interchange of them, as they recalled sadly and fondly now all the old man's military reminiscences, told in evenings by the cheery fire, and his pride in his name of Melville—one, he was wont to boast, that had never been found among the commonalty since the days of Galfrid, Lord of Melville in Lothian, in the days of Malcolm the Maiden. This harmless pride was his little weakness ; but the calamity of Gladys gave it a terrible shock, and he always ceased to indulge in it when he thought of her. The affectionate brothers lingered long together that night on the Knowe, or Fairy Knoll, from which the cottage had its name, while the clouds were assembling in the wildest masses on the hills of Ettrick and other mountains in the distance—full of sad and bitter thoughts, for, reared as they had been, this uprootal from their home and all its associations was a sharp pang—stored as their minds were with all the old history and traditions of the place they were leaving—the Forest of Ettrick, which once embraced all the vales of Tweed and Upper Clydesdale : the remains of the great Caledonian Forest, which reached from the Cheviots to Hamilton, and was ever so famous in war for its stately archers, 'The Flowers of the Forest,' so famed in the 'Lament for Flodden,' which Kate was wont to sing in her sweetest tones to Julian. And now, at that gloomy time in her bed, so warm and white, with its laced pillows and many curtains that hung from a gilded canopy, of what, or of whom, was Kate dreaming? Of him—Julian? We fear not ; or if she dreamt at all, it was of some such event as her presentation at court, with her coronet, equipage, and diamonds, as Countess of Deloraine. Yet Kate was not so bad or so hard-hearted as not to wish to know what had become of Julian and his brother when she came from London to Kingsmuir or to Deloraine after her marriage. Of Julian, naturally, she

longed to have some tidings, as she heard they had been reduced to poverty—her boy-lover, so tender, true and enthusiastic : but Julian and Gerard had passed away from the ken of all Ettrick as completely as if they had never existed—had gone forth into the great and busy, and too often bleak and heartless world, each to push his way elsewhere. And on this career we must hopefully follow them, as each was inspired by the honest desire of having

'Something to live for—life to begin ;
Something to fight for—something to win !'

CHAPTER XVIII.

A GIPSY DEN.

By a singular coincidence—but coincidences are constantly occurring in this world—it chanced that on the same day when the brothers set out on their somewhat forlorn journey southward by rail, Mr. Uriah Grippie was proceeding in the same direction, on legal business intent. Leaving his office in charge of an under paid and sorely-bullied drudge, he had proceeded into a certain part of Liddesdale to hold a Baron-court, we believe it is called, to collect the rents of a Border estate recently committed to his care. Since we saw him last, stretched on the floor of his office under the vengeful hand of old Gerard Melville, time had neither added to the mental virtues or bodily qualities of Uriah Grippie, who was now in his sixtieth year.

At a certain house on the estate the tenants had mustered in obedience to his circulars ; their rents had been rigidly exacted to the utmost farthing, and their claims for deductions closely scrutinised, for the pious, upright, and astute Uriah had a keen eye to his forthcoming percentage on the sum total, and for the tears of the tenants would not have abated a penny therefrom. Receipts had been given, and some ten thousand pounds in cash and notes duly secured in a cash-box, with which, and a legal-looking hand-bag stuffed with documents, he set out at nightfall on his return homewards, intending to take the nearest station on the line of railway for Dumfries. Being sordid and mean in all his actions, he obstinately declined to have either a vehicle or a guide. Phoo ! he required no guide—the latter or a hired 'fly' would both

cost money, and a penny saved is a penny gained ; though the country was new to him and unknown to him, he added that he had 'a good Scottish tongue in his head,' and could inquire the way.

Nevertheless, he lost the latter, after proceeding some miles, when darkness closed in. By that time he had too evidently left behind him the fine holm land, with its woods, plantations, and picturesque scenery, and was getting into a bleak, wild, and mountainous district, which was thinly populated, and where, by day, little more could be seen than sheep tracks and the ruinous peel-houses of the Elliots, Armstrongs, and other border raiders of past times. He was getting weary, too, and if he paused to look around him he could hear the last leaves fall fluttering from the almost bare trees, and the wind sighing through their branches with a melancholy sound. The night became weird in aspect. He was stumbling along a rugged mountain path, and between the trunks of some trees he could see the low, round moon, like a shield of polished silver, gleam coldly for a little space ; then dense clouds enveloped her, and the darkness seemed to become palpable—not even a star was visible. To add to his cheerless prospects, rain began to fall, and having utterly lost his way, and meeting no one of whom to inquire, he became utterly bewildered, but was forced to pursue the track he was on, knowing that it must lead somewhere. For in his front a light began to gleam, and as it was evidently from some house, he pushed on towards it, with the wind and rain beating in his face, and ere long found himself in front of a solitary wayside edifice, that, by its small sign-board, seemed a species of humble inn, or ale-house. Within, he heard voices and much coarse laughter; and ere he ventured to knock, he bethought himself, suspiciously, of whom he might be venturing among, of his own loneliness, and the great sum of money with which he was entrusted ; but he was faint with unwonted fatigue, and the pelting rain was increasing every moment. He knocked on the door, and the moment he did so the voices and the laughter ceased, but he heard, or fancied so, much whispering. The door was suddenly pulled open, after the removal of sundry bolts, and a middle-aged man, strong and muscular in form, grimy and

most forbidding in visage, appeared, with a candle flaring in his hand, and a scowl in his keen, inquiring eyes.

‘Who may you be?’ he asked.

‘One who has lost his way, my good sir,’ replied Uriah, blandly, adding, ‘and is getting soaked, as you may see.’

‘And you want shelter?’

‘For the night, and some supper, if you please,’ said Uriah, passing in, for it was too late to retreat, and indeed the idea of actual peril, in a well-ordered district, had not distinctly occurred to him as yet.

The scowl in the man’s keen grey eyes deepened, and it passed into a smile as he saw the hand-bag and cash-box, the contents of which rattled rather more distinctly than the bearer quite wished.

‘Come away in, Mr. Grippie,’ said the man; ‘ye are welcome.’

‘Grippie—you know me then?’

‘Brawly! I saw ye this morning. Collecting the laird’s rents, down by the Loan-end at Hermitage-burn,’ he added, ushering his visitor into a species of kitchen with a large fireplace, and a floor of clay, hard-beaten; a dingy and squalid-looking place, where four other men and a tattered, slipshod little girl were drinking and smoking at a plain deal table, which was drawn close to the fire of branches and peat that smouldered on the hearth. All their faces were instantly turned towards Grippie, at whom they stared with a species of sullen curiosity; and by the light of the single candle, which was now replaced on the table, he could see that they were a very unprepossessing party. The men were more tatterdemalion in aspect than one ever sees among Scottish peasantry. They were from twenty to thirty years of age, unkempt, unshaven, swarthy, and black-eyed. They were as evidently gipsies as the landlord was a poacher, and they all spoke a jargon of border Scotch and gipsy slang, peculiar to what is called ‘the mugger population of Yetholm,’ that would be unintelligible to the reader. With a bow and a made-up smile, Mr. Grippie took the seat that was offered him, feeling the while most unpleasant qualms at being recognised by this ill-looking crew, whom he could neither avoid nor remain with comfortably, as they knew who he was, and,

more than all, the great sum—to them a vast treasure—which he had with him in that unlucky cash-box, on which all their eyes instinctively fastened, ere they exchanged glances of intelligence with each other; without seeming to observe which Mr. Grippie spread his hands before the fire, and affected to feel himself, where he devoutly wished he was—at home! Something like a kind of humble bar that appeared in a corner served to assure Mr. Grippie that the house was, in reality, a species of wayside hostel for tramps or such people as he now saw there; but, in the other corner, and between the beams of the ceiling, were some salmon-leisters and two or three old rusty fowling-pieces, with nets, and black or liver-coloured cloths or rags, that looked suspiciously like suits for disguising dogs, and spoke undeniably of poaching by land and water. Mr. Grippie, while making some commonplace remarks, to which no one replied, and while rapidly making this survey of his surroundings, became suddenly aware that his host was locking and elaborately securing the entrance-door, the key of which he thrust into a pocket of his shabby old velveteen coat.

‘Why do you do that?’ he asked, aware that such extreme precautions are rarely used in rural districts.

‘Why?’ repeated the man, sullenly; ‘well, if you must know, Mr. Grippie, it is to keep in those who are in, and out those who are out.’

‘*Clegin the outhur*’ (i.e., shutting, or locking the door), said one gipsy, swarthy as an Italian organ-grinder, to another, with a wink.

‘I did not think this was an unruly district,’ said the lawyer.

‘Who said it was?’ growled the landlord.

‘Of course there is a police-station near this?’

‘Yes, Mr. Grippie.’

‘Where?’

‘About ten miles off.’

‘Call you that near?’

‘Yes, a d——d deal too near for my liking,’ said the host; and then, as if to throw their visitor off his guard, no easy task at any time, he added, ‘but come closer to the fire, your clothes are wet, and won’t you try a drop of the *romane*?’

And while using the gipsy word for whisky, he pushed the

black bottle towards the lawyer, who declined, alleging that he was 'a total abstainer, but would like some supper—cheese and bread, or anything that could be had without trouble.'

The slatternly girl rose, with evident unwillingness, from the side of the youngest gipsy, and proceeding to a cupboard, brought therefrom some cold meat, bread and butter. But the aspect of these, of their appurtenances, and the deal table on which they were laid, the company among which he found himself, and the whole situation, deprived the miserable Uriah Grippie of all appetite; he made a show of eating, nevertheless, and drank cold water, feeling confident that it could not be drugged, for he was now beginning to fear the very atmosphere he breathed. He felt, in short, inexpressibly wretched that these men should be aware of the treasure he had with him. He knew that these—fortunately for society a fast disappearing race—Scottish gipsies, for more than three-fourths of the year, live by begging, poaching, and pilfering, when they fail to sell or barter the articles in which they too often pretend to deal; that their wandering life is one of unrestrained license and idleness; that an ass and panniers is usually their whole property when they marry, and that the mountain heather and bog willows, with the growth of unenclosed moors and watercourses, supply them with the materials for the besoms and baskets they make for sale. And here was he, Uriah Grippie, solicitor, alone, belated at night, in one of their haunts, with ten thousand pounds in his cash-box. His heart's pulses seemed to stand still when he thought of it in all its grim probabilities. To attempt to maintain any conversation with men who spoke a slang so obscure was beyond even the assumed urbanity of the lawyer, though he could not help making a remark from time to time, while detecting a constant exchange of furtive glances that made him intensely uneasy; yet he made a great effort of self-control, and covered his new terrors and natural suspicion by an air of cheerfulness. There was no appearance of the rain abating, and, had it done so, he had doubts about the wisdom of setting forth again. If he did so he might be followed or prevented leaving the place at all. Hence such a proposition might precipitate the catastrophe he dreaded; and again and

again did he curse and repent the niggard spirit that made him alike decline a guide or a conveyance to the railway station. Again and again did his soul seem to sink into his heels, as he saw these men, and the girl too, silently and secretly surveying him and his fatal box with black, keen eyes, that were full of intelligence to each other. The cold supper was speedily removed, and the host, whose manner was naturally rough and brutal, seemed not disinclined to get into the good graces of his guest, and lull anything like suspicion. But the minutes of the night seemed as hours, yet the lawyer feared to draw forth his watch to see how the time went, though he longed, not for bed or sleep, but to be alone, beyond the range of those oppressive eyes—alone, that he might escape; for resistance he would never have thought of, had he been armed like a Bashi Bazook.

At last he began to yawn, affected great weariness and a desire to retire for the night; on which the host, lighting a candle-end in a clay-stick, ushered him to a small apartment on the upper floor; whither Mr. Grippie bore his bag and box, saying, with a smile that became ghastly in spite of himself,

‘I may as well take them with me, for they are full of valuable papers, that I may look at early in the morning; but I suppose you breakfast betimes.’

‘Oh yes; but you lawyers are queer chields,’ said the landlord, ‘and doubtless you’ll feel all the happier in your mind to have your belongings beside you.’

And he grinned as the contents of the cash-box rattled again, causing a pang of anguish in the heart of the lawyer. The moment the latter was left alone he made a rapid but minute examination of the chamber—trap he deemed it—in which he found himself. It was small, mean, and squalid. In one corner stood a curtainless bed, in another a deal trunk, a washstand and chair made up the furniture, together with a small looking-glass, in which Grippie saw for an instant the pallor of his features. The door had neither bolt nor lock, but only a wooden latch, which was lifted on the outside, in primitive fashion, by a piece of cord run through a hole, and this cord he instantly cut; while effectually to barricade the door he placed between it and the projection of the wall the deal box above mentioned, to prevent its being forced from

without ; though, of course, it could be broken down or torn from its hinges. He then sat down to think—think, and listen to the beating of his heart : then he started to the window, opened it softly, and looked out. The wind and rain, wet and gustily blew in his face. He could not be far from the ground, yet all was pitchy black outside, and he could see nothing, and was afraid to drop from the window, lest the fall might be beyond his calculation. Could he but wait and defy them till morning ! Defy them ! He had seen a ladder downstairs ; by that they could reach the window. No ! he must escape at once ; but how ? There was no fire ; the night was chill, and his teeth chattered with fear and cold alike. He heard voices in the room below speaking in low tones, that came upward through the planks of the worm-eaten floor, and Grippie put his ear close thereto and listened, and soon heard enough to make his blood run colder still. Another man had now joined them, Ringan Jannock, the ruffianly and ubiquitous poacher.

‘ Ten thousand pounds, say ye ? ’ exclaimed this personage, exultingly.

‘ To a doit,’ said the landlord ; ‘ but hush-sh-sh, he can’t be asleep yet, and may hear us.’

‘ Let him hear,’ growled the other ; ‘ his wierd is told.’

They were evidently all grouped close together, and by their conversation, though conducted in Scottish gipsy slang, he knew enough, by the terrible words *moule*, to kill, *nagen*, a body, *ratte*, blood, *baré louer*, good money, and so forth, that they were forming a deliberate plot to slay him that night, bury his body in the nearest bog, wash up the blood, and divide the contents of his cash-box. In slang they still continued their terrible conversation.

‘ If there be ten thousand pounds in that box, such a prize does na come our way ilka day,’ said Ringan.

‘ Then he’ll have a watch and purse,’ said another.

‘ Bah—they’re not worth thinking of, and had better be buried with him and his bag,’ remarked the landlord.

‘ If he had only taken a glass of the *romane*, drugged as it is, we might have strangled him in his sleep ; as it is ——’

‘ We must use the knife or cudgel ; perhaps both.’

As he listened, emotion drew his lips back from his teeth,

and he had, though he knew it not, something of the aspect of a hunted hyæna. Was it not all a nightmare, that he, sleek, careful, and cautious Uriah Grippie, was in a predicament so awful?

‘Heaven help me!’ moaned the wretched lawyer, forgetting that it was rather late in life for him to think of seeking aid from heaven. All the cases of which he had read or heard, of cold-blooded and brutal assassinations for lucre, under similar, or nearly similar circumstances, came crowding into his mind, increasing his abject terror and supreme agony of soul. Hunted to death like a rat, or the poor otter in our opening chapter, for the first time in his life Mr. Uriah Grippie repented him of the study and practice of the law, and thought that if he could escape from this horrible peril he would be less a lawyer and more an honest man in the time to come. By nature a hard and heartless man, now on the verge of a terrible death, all his past life, his long career of legal chicanery and impious hypocrisy, rose before him like a stupendous column towering heavenward. He saw many a pale face—the faces of the robbed, the wronged, and the oppressed—of proud men crushed to the dust, of weeping widows and starved children; for the career of such a man as Grippie, when he gives all his soul to the malpractice of the law, is simply that of a vampire. For the death at hand he was in no way prepared—a death that might never be discovered or avenged; and for the first time since infancy he did put up a genuine prayer to heaven. He had prayed much and loudly too in his time, as an elder of his Tabernacle; but his prayer of the present dreadful hour was a genuine and very different style of invocation. Steps were heard on the old crooked wooden stairs—stealthy steps that he could not have heard had he been asleep. They paused at the door, some fierce whispering ensued, and then the heart of Grippie stood still, and in his terror he would have shrieked, but his breath was gone, and, as if a spirit was near him, he felt ‘the hair of his flesh stand up.’

CHAPTER XIX.

A DISCOVERY.

THOSE who were without upon the landing-place had evidently discovered that the string of the rustic latch had been cut, and that they were without the means of lifting it softly. He heard their footsteps descend and die away, while voices beneath showed that the grim consultation had been resumed. Uriah Grippie respired again, though he feared they had but gone for the ladder, and would capture him by esca-lade through the window. Perhaps they would not have been lured into the intended commission of a crime so great and heinous but for the great sum—the collected rents—which they knew to be in his possession. The temptation had proved too great for men who, like them, were wanderers and lawless by nature and habit. How bitterly he—and not for the first time, cursed and repented him of the meanness that made him come afoot, to save the few shillings a vehicle would have cost him. At that moment he would have been safely speeding homeward ; and now that avarice was about to cost him that which, to him at least, was priceless—his life ! True to his instinctive cunning, he conceived the idea of compounding with them for a handsome sum, to get away, giving them any promises on one hand, while he should hasten to inform the police on the other. Then he feared he might have to refund that sum out of his own pocket ; or that the whole might be taken, and himself destroyed after all. Large drops of icy sweat rolled over his brow and into his eyes, and the moments seemed as hours. He now ventured to draw forth his watch and look at it—two hours past midnight. At that season there would be no daylight for nearly five hours. The voices grew still ; all seemed silent below. Had they gone to sleep ? To attempt to steal stealthily from the house was impossible ; the key of the door was in the landlord's possession. Could he pass the remainder of the dark morning thus ? His meagre candle-end was consuming fast. All was still without now—the rain had ceased and the wind had died away. In a few minutes more his candle would be consumed ; he would be in the dark, and

he felt that if these bloodhounds again approached his door, even barricaded as it was, he should die of sheer fright ; and this made him prepare for instant action. He tied the sheets of the bed together. Fortunately for him it stood close to the window, over which he dropped the lower end of one, securing the other fast to the bed-rail. He slung the cash-box round his neck securely by his silk handkerchief, blew out his candle, and softly, yet quickly, began his descent, at the moment that there rose a sound like thunder in his ears, as the gipsies and Ringan Jannock, with all their fury and strength, were endeavouring to break in the door of his room. He quickly slid down to the bottom of the lower sheet, but with fear and astonishment found himself yet far from the ground, and that he could not even see it in the intensity of the darkness. The crash of blows continued on the door of the room he had quitted ; oaths and maledictions reached his excited ears with the sound of the former, and there he swung, oscillating at the lower end of his sheet-rope, fearing to let go, as it suddenly occurred to him that on the side he had descended the house probably abutted on a rock. And such was the case, for when suddenly his grasp failed him, as his strength gave way, he went rolling down, down, he knew not whither. On reaching the bottom he became nearly senseless with the shock, and for a moment or two lay still and breathless. The reader may marvel what all the perils of an obscure country lawyer like Uriah Grippie can have to do with our story ; but eventually they led to his knowledge of the existence of those in whom we are chiefly interested—Julian and his brother, with whose fortunes and misfortunes he was, unluckily for them, too much woven up. He had rolled down into what appeared to be the bed of a mountain rivulet. He was covered with bruises, but felt them not at that exciting time. He knew the peril of remaining, and scrambled up ; sheer terror endued his trembling limbs with factitious strength beyond his years or habits of life, and he fled, he knew not, and cared not, in what direction, so that he could put a distance between himself and danger. Down hill apparently he went, headlong in the dark, if not exactly with the speed, certainly with all the terror of a hunted hare, his cash-box making an odious clatter at every

step. Often he tumbled and fell sprawling over stones and hillocks or furrows, but started up breathlessly to resume his flight, and reached a path, little better than a track, but doubtless the same which he had before pursued in the other direction so fatally for himself. Perspiration came from all his pores ; he panted painfully, rather than breathed ; yet on and on he struggled in the dark and voiceless solitude, after the oaths and imprecations of his pursuers, who had followed him at random, died away behind. Suddenly all further power of endurance and volition seemed to pass out of him. He fell and found himself unable to rise. He lay in a field-ditch, under the shelter of a turf-dyke, broad-leaved burdocks and gorse, which he trusted would conceal him, and there he remained *en perdue*, worn nigh unto death, and scarcely daring to breathe, fearing that he might be tracked by dogs as well as men, though he must now have proceeded some miles. Would morning never dawn ! he thought.

He must have been asleep, or somehow unconscious, for some time afterwards, when he suddenly roused himself to look about, the uprisen sun was shining gaily on the green hills, the grey mist was melting away about their summits. He was in a wild and solitary mountain district, no house or home near him, and he was still as ignorant of the path to pursue as he had been when in the dark. But he gathered heart and courage now amid the broad light of golden day, and setting forth, with limbs stiffened by damp, exposure, over-exertion, and sorely bruised with his many falls, he began to follow a track across the hills that evidently led to a less lonely region, where the pungent fragrance of the pine thickets, wet with the rain of the past night, came on the fresh morning breeze, and the sheep were quietly eating turnips in the fields of faded grass. No emotion of thankfulness to heaven for his narrow escape was in the heart of Uriah Grippie, who never reflected that had he failed to achieve it, another hour had doubtless seen him mangled and hidden in an unknown grave. He felt but a tempest of vengeance and hate—hate and vengeance which might be just enough in some respects ; and when he looked at his suit of black broadcloth (he always wore black, as professional men in Scotland usually do) and saw the state to

which it had been reduced by clay, mud, and tatters, and by all he had undergone, his rage redoubled. Another day would see his wrongs in the hands of the Procurator Fiscal and the police, and he was already grinding his teeth in the anticipated vengeance of his well-beloved law, when a cry of abject terror escaped him, on finding himself, at a turn of the path, between two copses, face to face with Ringan Jannock and the host of the den from which he had escaped ! Ringan and the gipsy had each a formidable cudgel, and with fierce imprecations they sprang exultingly upon him, with murder and wild exultation too surely in their eyes.

A cry, something between a groan and a shriek, was uttered by the fugitive, as he was struck to the earth by the poacher Jannock ; but ere he could repeat the stroke, he too was struck down by a blow from a heavy walking-cane, dealt unsparingly under the right ear.

He scrambled up and was about to close with his assailant, but shrank back on finding that he was face to face with Julian Melville.

He cowered like a stricken dog under the young man's fiery and indignant eye. He raised his cudgel as if about to strike, then muttered a savage oath, and crying, 'A curse upon you, Melville, as you call yourself ; may you dree your mother's shame and your ain black wierd to the dregs !' and then took to his heels, followed by his companion in guilt, while Julian lifted up the luckless Uriah, who had been stunned by the crashing blow he had received.

And now to explain how Julian came to be in that neighbourhood, and so opportunely.

Leaving, as he too surely felt he was about to do, his native land for ever, Julian, before joining his brother at Berwick, had conceived a strong fancy to look on the old Castle of Hermitage, which, had he possessed his birthright, would have given him the title which he deemed was justly his. And to gratify this lingering wish—a superstition of the heart, and which may be deemed in this cold, hard, and practical age, no doubt, a silly one—he had proceeded, in the dawn of the early morning, along the bank of the stream named the Hermitage, till he came to the castle so called, and sat down to contemplate it with a heart swollen by

many bitter, proud, and pitiful emotions, which, under all his circumstances, this hollow species of gratification was well calculated to excite ; and often in after times, when sick and worn and weary nigh unto death, in distant places and amid sad and terrible surroundings, his memory would wander back to the peaceful morning when he sat by the limpid, murmuring waters of the Hermitage, and saw the vast mass of the old castle, crimsoned by the rising sun, towering high amid a scene of barrenness and desolation.

Still in complete repair, and one of the greatest strongholds on the Scottish Borders, it is a tall, massive, gloomy double tower, girt by a ditch and ramparts, old as the thirteenth century ; and as the wanderer—for such now he was—surveyed its mighty mass with moistened and eager eyes, it was impossible for him not to recall many of its brilliant and terrible memories of the past ; for there in a dungeon had the brave Dalhousie been chained and starved to death ; there Bothwell nearly died under the moss-trooper's blade ; and the Queen came through the trackless region by the Liddal to visit him ; and there, in earlier times, the dark Lord Soulis was slain by the Laird of Mangerton.

Peaceful and still looked the old castle now, with the smoke curling high in air from its huge chimneys, and its grated windows shining in the morning sun ; and Julian would have sketched it, but he shivered at the thought ; he had never had a pencil in his hand since last he sketched with Kate.

‘ Lord Hermitage—Lord Hermitage ! ’ muttered Julian, and the words and the title seemed to be burned into his heart and brain. ‘ Oh aid me, Heaven ; guide me, blessed God, to clear our mother's name and fame ; to right her wrongs, and I may yet die the Lord Hermitage ! ’

So prayed the lad aloud and pathetically.

As he turned away, full of sorrow, just regret, and natural indignation, how little could he dream that before he had walked some twenty yards or so he was to rescue from a violent death the only man in the whole world who could prove to him beyond a legal doubt that he was actually the Lord Hermitage ! Yet so it was. He bathed and bound up the wound inflicted on the lawyer's head by the bludgeon of

Ringan Jannock, heard his somewhat wandering and incoherent account of his terrible adventures over-night, as he gladly availed himself of Julian's proffered arm, to assist him to the nearest village or railway station.

Though little accustomed to good society, Uriah Grippie could see that his preserver was a young man possessing the best style of bearing, with a handsome, winning, and frank, though somewhat saddened, expression of face. After he had nearly relieved his agitated mind in grim threats, and exultation at the anticipation of vengeance on Ringan Jannock and the gipsies, he said : 'Most grateful am I to you, young gentleman, for your gallant aid and great kindness, and a most useful witness you will be when I have that scoundrel Jannock and his comrades by the heels.'

'He is a poacher from Ettrick ; I know him well.'

'You do ! that is lucky. Now, as a witness ——'

'Please do not think of detaining me as such,' said Julian, who disliked the turn the conversation was taking. 'My finances can ill afford detention, and I have no desire to figure in a witness-box and undergo, perhaps, all manner of cross-examination.'

'But may I ask your name, young gentleman ?'

'Melville,' was the curt reply.

'And your residence ?'

'Fairy Knowe,' replied the other, half absently.

'In Ettrick ? you spoke just now of Ettrick.'

'Yes. Does it interest you ? Where my future home may be I know not,' continued Julian, who had no desire to enlighten a total stranger as to his movements.

The lawyer paused and looked Julian keenly in the face, and passed a hand over his forehead, as if to clear or recall his thoughts.

'Fairy Knowe,' he said, as if to himself. 'I knew a Captain Gerard Melville who lived there.'

'My poor old grandfather,' exclaimed Julian, his countenance brightening.

'The son of his son ?' queried the lawyer.

'He had no son,' replied Julian, looking aside.

'How, then ?'

'My brother Gerard and I are the sons of his daughter,'

said Julian, feeling intense bitterness of soul, and already anticipating another question, which fortunately Uriah did not ask, but merely said :

‘Gerard ; so named from the old Captain?’

‘Exactly ; but we are now near the railway station.’

A sudden light dawned upon the legal mind of Uriah Grippie : the name of Melville, the age of Julian, and his Christian name too, all pointed he knew to what ; but he would keep his own counsel ; oh yes, assuredly he would keep his own counsel—yet. He now ventured another remark as a ‘feeler.’

‘A noble building, yonder Castle of Hermitage.’

He could see that Julian’s face flushed.

‘I came this way simply to see it,’ replied the youth, ‘ere I turn my back on this district, perhaps for ever.’

While Julian’s eyes were bent sadly on the mass of the now distant castle, Grippie rapidly made some memoranda in his note-book. He had seen the marriage of Kate Kingsmuir to the heir of Deloraine duly chronicled in the public prints, and also the death of Captain Melville, with perfect indifference, not caring a jot about the three ; but now—*now* that he knew that there were heirs born of that ill-omened and secret marriage, to which he alone possessed the key!—In a wild and unwonted burst of gratitude, he had actually at first been not indisposed to tell Julian all he knew and had the power to do. Then came suggestions born of his innate caution and covetousness. He would take the case ‘to avizandum,’ reserve his knowledge and his *power* to prove the marriage of Gladys and the legitimate claims of the wanderer, whose likeness to the Earl of Deloraine was so striking, until he discovered how that peer would pay again for the silence he might deem more valuable now that he had a young and wealthy bride. If *not*, then Uriah would change banners and go over to the enemy, take up the cause of the heir, which in his hands would speedily swell to the proportions of a noble and profitable plea, that might become to him as a mine of wealth, and he rubbed his cold, fishy hands at the anticipation of the whole affair viewed from any point of view.

Although as a lawyer he tried to make it his business to

know everything, it struck him with astonishment that he had never taken the trouble to inquire whether Gladys Melville had left children, for somehow she had passed completely out of his knowledge. Cautious, reticent, and, like a genuine lawyer, having an eye to his own ends, he resolved to acquire all the information he wished, yet without giving any clue to himself or his object.

'Ah! and so you and your brother were born at Fairy Knowe?' he remarked, as if casually.

'No.'

'Where, then?'

'Among the Rhinns of Galloway.'

'A wild part of the country.'

'But dear to us; and now, sir,' added Julian, who intensely disliked the manner in which this mud-stained and certainly ignoble-looking personage had so steadily sought to probe the secret affairs of his family, 'here comes my train, and as I have not a moment to lose I must bid you good-morning.'

They parted, and the train swept Julian away. Full of his thoughts, and thus heedless that his very battered aspect rendered him a source of speculation to the few loiterers about the solitary way-side station, the lawyer, less intent on tracking out his assailants than discovering all the necessary threads to the story he was about to weave up, sat with his note-book in hand lost in reverie, as he bit the end of his pencil from time to time, and made his memoranda as they occurred to him.

In one point Mr. Uriah Grippie outwitted himself amid the pleasure of that morning's discovery. He had forgotten to be assured that the sons of Gladys would be found at Fairy Knowe when he wanted them! For the selfish reasons given, he had left Julian—the preserver of his life—in total ignorance of all that he could do for him and Gerard, telling not even his own name. For sooth to say, unprepossessed by his appearance, Julian had never asked, and, in his dread of being hampered and trammelled by having to appear as a witness, made no secret of his haste to be gone; all the more so, too, that he was nervously susceptible on being questioned now about his family, and bitterly resented the unmerited sense of humiliation to which such questions as those put by

this stranger subjected himself and the brother he loved so dearly. In front of Hermitage he had passionately and pathetically prayed that Heaven might aid him in righting his mother's wrongs and vindicating his own just claims to a noble heritage ; and in the future we shall see how far these ardent hopes were fulfilled. The brothers met at Berwick, and taking the train for London, set out together on the pilgrimage of life in earnest.

CHAPTER XX.

URIAH GRIPPIE LAYS DOWN THE LAW.

A FEW weeks after this saw Mr. Uriah Grippie—for, with true legal caution, that personage had to verify some of the information he had wormed out of Julian by documentary evidence from parish clerks and so forth—proceeding in a hired vehicle, with much complacency, up the long, sweeping, and stately avenue that led to Deloraine, bordered by stately oaks, 'whose limbs a thousand years have worn.'

Whether he punished, or 'pursued,' as he would have phrased it, the gang in whose hands he had so nearly perished in Liddesdale, has little to do with our story ; we rather believe he did, though he would gain nothing by doing so. Mr. Grippie was one of those obliging persons who will hold a candle to—we all know whom, if they think their interests may be advanced by doing so ; yet he was a leading elder in his Tabernacle, an obscure shrine in one of the back-slums of the old red burgh by the broad blue Nith. Unimpressible though he was, as he drew near Deloraine, and saw its gigantic mass, the most marked object in all the surrounding landscape, by its stately bulk absorbing the eye, grim and strong, as befitted the age of turbulence and violence in which it had been reared, he felt the littleness of his own position in life, as contrasted with the owner of such an edifice. The shadows of the early spring evening were darkening around its towers and turrets. In the moat, made by a mountain burn, encircling the rock whereon it stands, the white cups and broad green leaves of the water-lilies were floating, and noiselessly some stately swans were sailing to and fro ; and there the crested heron, with its strong, sharp

bill, the most patient and attentive of anglers, may be seen at times. Where the drawbridge swung of old, there was now a handsome stone arch, and great vases, usually filled with flowers, were along the parapets where culverins had frowned when Cromwell passed that way. Thus, though neither sentimental nor poetical, Mr. Uriah Grippie was impressed by the vastness of Deloraine, and though a bitter democrat at heart, 'he dearly loved a lord,' having all that profound veneration for rank which is an idiosyncrasy in the character of the low-born Scot : 'A man's a man for a' that,' but he views a lord as something more. His arrival in a hired vehicle did not impress the gate-porter or liveried servants much ; thus he was left to cool his heels at the gate and ring repeatedly before any of these personages came, with their lazy and languid insouciance of bearing, to attend upon him, and take up his name, as 'his lordship was at home.'

Deloraine was seated with his Countess, the still bright Kate, the lost love of the outcast Julian, in a luxuriously furnished drawing-room, now lighted by waxen candles in brackets of silvered Venetian bronze. The curtains were drawn, the apartment was stately, airy, spacious, and had every appurtenance wealth and taste could give it. He was idling over a sporting paper ; she engaged on some silken fancy work, and her pet dog lay coiled on the luxurious rug at her feet, before the blazing fire. But as Deloraine was an epitome of many past ages, in the room were portraits of those days when no man was deemed a man who was unable to give a home-thrust with his sword as deftly as he could tie the ribbons of a woman's hood. From time to time the *blasé* Earl looked at the face of his girl-wife, sweet and delicate as an apple-blossom, with all her masses of red-golden hair, for such it was, rather than auburn, and felt himself old in years—older in—well, to put it mildly—experience of the world and the world's darkest ways—and wondered that he was, at last, the husband of one so fair and guileless. A stealthily-paced servant in livery entered with a card upon a silver salver, and though visitors were less frequent at Deloraine than in Tyburnia, his lordship took it half absently, while Kate looked up inquiringly.

'Mr. Grippie, Solicitor-at-Law !' muttered the Earl, changing colour, for the name was not without unpleasant associations, 'and just before dinner.'

'A curious time for a visit—and from a total stranger, as I suppose he is,' said Kate.

'What can the fellow want?' exclaimed the Earl, with sudden irritation of tone. 'Who *can* he be? Ask his business.'

'I did so, my lord,' replied the servant, coolly, 'but he declined to give it.'

'Tell him to write.'

'His business is for your ear alone, my lord, and he says it is most important.'

'Me alone—odd.'

'Yes, my lord.'

'Where is the fellow?'

'In the library.'

In that stately apartment, where the well-bound volumes stood in close ranks on shelves of varnished wainscot, Mr. Grippie started to his feet, and bowed low to the Earl, who responded by a brief nod, and had his eyeglass wedged in his right eye in a fashion that made it glare and flash in the light of the chandelier, as he scrutinised the figure and face of Grippie, which he could scarcely recall, and yet twenty years had not added many wrinkles to his vulgar features, while the twinkle of his cold, restless, and cunning eyes was quite unchanged. The Earl haughtily motioned him to a seat, and stood himself, but with his back to the fire.

'I have to congratulate your lordship,' said Mr. Grippie, smiling, and assuming an air of confidence.

'The deuce you have—on what?' asked Deloraine, re-adjusting his eyeglass.

'On having so suddenly committed—ha—hah—matrimony a second time.'

'A *second* time? What the devil do you mean, sir? and *suddenly*, too! Are you aware, sir, that you permit your tongue a strange licence, especially here in Deloraine?'

As the Earl spoke, his dark brows met over his straight and handsome nose, and his closely-set eyes had in them the same expression which had latterly excited terror in poor Gladys during her last loving days in Wiesbaden. 'More

than a year ago—if I condescend to explain to you, a stranger—Kingsmuir of that ilk, promised me his eldest daughter. He could not spare her at the time ; she was too young and all that sort of thing ; but mine she was to be, if I did nothing unworthy of her.’

Mr. Uriah Grippie coughed dubiously behind his hand.

‘And now that she is mine, what do you mean by speaking of matrimony a *second* time !’

The lawyer paused, for the coolness, hauteur, and perfect insouciance of the Earl disconcerted even him, but for a time only.

‘Mr. Grippie, that is your name, I think,’ continued the Earl, looking at the card and then tossing it aside, ‘out with what you have got to say, for as yet you have said too much or too little ; and I have not much patience for either course.’

The two men looked at each other steadily and defiantly. Grippie felt that he had power over the Earl ; the latter deemed that, beyond a letter or two, he had no power of exposing him to his young Countess, and that he had simply come on a mission of deliberate extortion.

‘Will you look sharp, sir ?’

‘My lord, as we sow so shall we reap.’

‘Don’t cant to me, sir ! Your vehicle is waiting, I presume.’

‘I am in no haste, my lord, and I am not canting.’

‘I don’t understand the drift of this d—d intrusion ! But I suppose it means money—extortion—eh, old six-and-eight-pence ?’

‘It is on a matter not unfamiliar to your lordship,’ replied Grippie, with growing deliberation, ‘and concerns a point in the law of Scotland.’

‘Curse Scotland and her laws !’ exclaimed the Earl, with undignified fury, ‘what are either to me ?’

‘Very little, I doubt not.’

‘*You* doubt not—and why, pray ?’

‘Because, as a Scottish peer and landowner, we know well how little you and your set——’

‘Fellow, you talk of our “set” !’

‘Yes, undoubtedly.’

‘Go on ; you are amusing now.’

‘We know well how you value Scotland and her laws, save

in so far as you can make money out of one, and set the other at defiance.'

'Don't attempt to act the patriot here, Mr. Grippie ; it is intensely absurd in a man of your profession,' said the Earl, who, by nature fiery, impatient, and while longing to throw his visitor out of the window, felt himself compelled to temporise and exert patience with him ; for, loving Kate as much as it was in his selfish nature to love any one, Deloraine, to do him justice, had a genuine horror of that dark story of which Grippie was the custodian coming to *her* ears, and that, however many children she might have, there were two with a prior claim in the sight of nature, and it might be in the sight of the law ; and, more than all, that one of these two had actually been her own lover !

He viewed Grippie simply as a reptile, yet felt himself thus so far in his power that, with assumed composure, he said, while pointedly looking at his watch, 'Will you explain your business, sir ? I have to dress for dinner, and don't choose to keep Lady Deloraine waiting.'

'It concerns the late Lady Hermitage and the heirs of her body lawfully begotten, my lord ; so you will please to listen to me with patience.'

Though he knew something of this kind was coming, the dark face of the Earl grew very pale, and though he started as if a wasp had stung him and his eyes gleamed dangerously, he remained perfectly quiet, and had to listen to much more than he calculated upon, or quite cared to hear, advanced by Mr. Grippie in the interest of his 'clients,' for as such, all unknown to themselves, had he adopted them for the time.

'Your lordship will excuse me,' he began with great suavity, 'but we lawyers, like policemen, are more than any other class brought face to face with the crimes and follies of mankind. It is twenty years since we met for the first and only time, yet I doubt whether your lordship recognises me ?

'You—oh—aw—yes ! I recognise you now—though, I must admit, with difficulty.'

'An old correspondent, my lord,' urged Grippie coolly.

'Yes—and a d——d expensive one,' said the Earl, bluntly.

'Strange ! that we should meet but for a few minutes twenty years ago, and——'

'Well, sir ! you have been deuced well paid for those few minutes. What is your object now—money ?'

'No, my lord.'

'That is well, for not a shilling more shall you have from me.'

A faint smile spread over the face of Mr. Grippie as he said, 'I am here in the interests of the Lord Hermitage ; but perhaps I should have written.'

'The Lord—*who* do you say ?'

'I spoke plain enough—the Lord Hermitage.'

'And who the devil is he ?' asked the Earl, defiantly.

'All this tone is quite absurd with me ; you know right well to whom I refer.'

Deloraine certainly did know, but affected ignorance. Then, after glaring through his eyeglass at the impassive face of the lawyer, he said, 'Fellow, you have been well paid in the past time for silence.'

'I must be better paid now,' was the other's cool response : 'now that there is a plea to be taken up which no lawyer in the land would willingly lose ; a marriage to be proved, and heirs to an old and honoured title brought forward.'

'You are mad !'

'I am not mad, my lord.'

'The matter you refer to was no marriage.'

'It *was* a marriage, and I have the proofs of it.'

'And these proofs ?' said Lord Deloraine, with a gesture and accent of supreme contempt.

'Are noted here,' replied Grippie, drawing forth his memorandum-book. 'Firstly : a duplicate certificate of the marriage, drawn up by me, signed by your lordship and Miss Gladys Melville, and witnessed by my two clerks.'

'Duplicate ? There was no duplicate.'

'Think again, my lord.'

He did reflect, and it now flashed upon his memory that he *had* done what Gladys in her confusion had forgotten, signed two papers ; and an emotion of baffled rage took possession of him.

'Go on,' said he.

'Secondly : there are three of your lordship's letters, enclosing cheques and Bank of Scotland notes, the dates and

numbers of which have been taken ; and in these letters you refer to 'the ceremony,' while repudiating it. Thirdly : a certified extract from the Fremdenbuch of an hotel in the Schützenhofstrasse of Wiesbaden, showing the date at which 'Lord and Lady Hermitage' resided there as married persons. Fourthly : the certificate of the birth of her ladyship's children in Galloway, with the date thereof, and registered as the sons of Gladys Melville and Julian Scot, commonly called the Lord Hermitage. You had taught the poor thing to deem her marriage a sham, or that all the proofs of it had been destroyed. So,' added Mr. Grippie, remembering the prompt and gallant service done to himself by Julian, 'I have to congratulate you on having a noble and manly heir to your title and estates.'

Deloraine thought only of his girl-wife, and what her emotions would be if she heard this ; and in furious language he repudiated all his visitor advanced. But, cool as a cucumber, the latter stuck to the truth and value of his documents and statements.

'My lord, though you have been much absent from home,' continued Mr. Grippie, perfectly unmoved by the white anger of the earl, 'surely you must know that if a man and a woman in presence of witnesses deliberately announce their resolution to become man and wife, that formality, simple though it be, constitutes a binding marriage, and that such a union, even if celebrated in Scotland by the natives of another country, is, beyond all question, equally binding on them. According to the Act of Parliament, "no irregular marriage contracted in Scotland, by declaration, acknowledgment, or ceremony, shall be *valid* unless one of the parties had, at the date thereof, his or her usual place of residence there, or had lived in Scotland for twenty-one days next preceding such marriage ; any law, custom, or usage to the contrary notwithstanding. Now your lordship and Miss Gladys Melville, had, of course, *both* resided in Scotland more than the time required by law. The form of ceremony depends entirely on the place where that ceremony is performed, and the legal capacity of the parties to marry is determined by the country to which those parties belong, and we hold it in Scottish law that a marriage *duly* solemnised in any country

is binding in point of form over the whole world. Thus was yours so, my lord, being duly solemnised according to the law of the land.'

With a dull sense of impotent anger the Earl of Deloraine listened to all this. He had long since ceased to have even a vestige of a regret for the sad fate of Gladys. Paternal emotion he felt no more than the crocodile may that leaves its eggs to be hatched in the sand. He certainly hoped for a legal heir to Deloraine now that he had married the wealthy daughter of Colonel Kingsmuir, of Kingsmuir and that ilk ; but he had no desire to find one thus suddenly in the person of a tall fellow of twenty years of age, the son of the humbler, though not less well-born daughter of the dead Captain at Fairy Knowe. So, all things considered, he thought he would come to terms with Mr. Uriah Grippie, for possession of the duplicate certificate and other compromising documents.

'Come, Mr. Grippie,' said he, with sudden but rather grim suavity, 'every man has his price ; my turf experiences have taught me that : what is yours ?'

The lawyer regarded him with a leering expression out of one eye, which exasperated the Earl so much that he felt inclined to knock him down.

'We are men of the world, my lord,' he began.

'We?' queried Deloraine, haughtily.

'Well—I am a man of the world.'

'Then as a man of the world what say you to five hundred pounds for those papers !'

'Couldn't do it, my lord, in the interests of my clients.'

'A thousand pounds, then,' said Deloraine, his dark eyes flashing fire.

'For that sum you shall have them.'

'Delivered by you into my own hand.'

'Into your own hand, my lord.'

A thousand pounds to crush for ever the birthright of the sons of poor Gladys—they to whom that sum would have seemed a small fortune. *Nemo repente fuit turpissimus*, says the Latin maxim ; but was there ever a time when the Earl—we shall not speak of the lawyer—would have been less base ? Promising to return in due time to Deloraine, the unwelcome visitor took his departure ; and, for reasons

that he could not foresee, it was decided by fate that he should return there no more. He resolved first to discover what sum Julian and Gerard would bind themselves down by document to pay him if he substantiated their claims before the world, and instantly wrote to that effect to the address the former had given him, almost inadvertently, Fairy Knowe ; but his own letters were returned, marked—‘Gone—no address left.’ For some successive weeks he advertised for the brothers, as ‘the heirs of the late Captain Melville ;’ notices which somewhat perplexed the evil Earl, who could not comprehend what they meant, but which he kept sedulously out of the Countess’s way ; but as no response ever came to them, Mr. Grippie thought that he might as well take the promised documents to Deloraine, and realise his thousand pounds. One forenoon in spring—a forenoon he was fated long to remember, he took down from its shelf his well-known strong-box, which contained several dockets of secret papers on which he set considerable store, and lifted them in succession again and again ; but that particular one, which he had tied with red tape, and labelled ‘anent the marriage of Lord Hermitage,’ had vanished ! A cold sweat burst over him ; he tossed all the contents of the box out, examining them one by one. No—beyond a doubt the papers were gone—they were no longer there ; but gone where and how ? The lock of the box was a remarkable one, and the key thereof had never been out of his possession. He felt himself grow pale and the cold perspiration pour over him, as it had done in the den of the gipsies. He threw himself into a chair with his head between his hands and strove to think. He remembered one night having dreamt of this catastrophe, and now that dream seemed to have been realised. No—no ! He could not adopt the idea ! they must be in the box—those papers worth to him now one thousand pounds in cash. Again he plunged his tremulous hands among the bundles of documents ; but sought, as before, in vain, and he was compelled to come to the startling conclusion that the papers connected with the marriage of Gladys had vanished ! His avarice, fear, suspicion, and rage were excited in turn and all together. Avarice, at the crushing fact of losing one thousand pounds ; fear, that thieves had been in or about the premises, till the most

minute inspection convinced him that such could not have been the case ; suspicion, but of whom ? None knew the value of these particular papers but himself, and he had seen them again and again since he had dismissed his last office drudge ; and his old, half-blind housekeeper was beyond being suspected. Moreover, his keys never left his person by day or night, any more than the eyes in his head : so *who*, in the name of all that was wonderful, had purloined the papers, and where had they gone, he asked of himself again and again, in baffled rage, mingled with the most intense perplexity. More than half that day passed before he could persuade himself to lock the fatal box and replace it on the shelf, with the terrible conviction that the papers were good, and with them the promised thousand pounds from the Earl of Deloraine. To the latter, after many days of sore perplexity and much inward groaning, he wrote informing him of the unexplainable catastrophe.

‘Lost—gone—who the devil can have those papers ?’ hought the Earl ; ‘ they will be sure to crop up at a future time in the hands of some other legal scoundrel !’

And when he remembered the advertisements he had seen, he disbelieved all the written and reiterated assurances of Uriah Grippie that he had nothing to do with them, and also that since the brothers had left Fairy Knowe all trace of them had been lost. The Earl made up his mind that the lawyer had ‘gone over to the enemy,’ taken advice of counsel on the matter, and every morning, when the butler opened the despatch box and laid his letters before him, he felt a thrill of dread and disgust to find among them some legal intimation of a forthcoming storm before the Lords of Council and Session. But time passed on without this catastrophe occurring ; the London season drew nigh, and thither he and the Countess in due time betook themselves.

CHAPTER XXI.

LONDON.

AMID a scene to them new and startling, Julian and Gerard stood, in a rather bewildered frame of mind, on the platform at King’s Cross station, in the hurry-skurry of a great train

newly arrived from the North, and of others departing into the haze and gloom of a dark evening in February.

'The world is a wide place, Julian,' said his brother, as they gathered together their plaids and rugs ; 'and there are many roads that lead from dear old Fairy Knowe.'

'And one, with the iron-horse, has brought us here, on the first stage of a forlorn pilgrimage.'

'Nay, nay, don't talk in that fashion,' said the other cheerfully, as their luggage—only a couple of portmanteaus—was brought from the capacious depths of the van ; 'we have come to London with something better in our pockets than the proverbial half-crown.'

It was a cold, murky, and choky evening ; the spacious station looked smoking and cavernous, and as the rain had been falling all the past day, the metropolis was seen under its worst and gloomiest aspect ; and as they drove through the streets, the figures of the passers seemed in the steamy gaslight and mist, like Ossian's ghosts, half seen, half lost. Even the aspect of the vehicle shocked them. The cab was a genuine London one—a disgrace to Europe in the aspect of its driver, harness, and horse ; its windows were cracked, and rattled fearfully as it crawled and clattered through the sloppy streets to a humble boarding-house, the address of which had been given to them by the parish minister of Kingsmuir, who took an interest in the friendless lads—a good specimen of an old Scottish pastor, who for nearly fifty years had officiated to the people of his sequestered incumbency, had baptised all save the aged, taught them the catechism, given them their first communion, married them, buried them, and had seen out many. The streets through which the travellers were taken by cabby, for a purpose of his own, by their strangeness of aspect and their squalor, which the glaring gin-palaces fully revealed, crushed and damped Julian and his brother in spirit. They knew nothing of the stateliness of the West End, or those outskirts of London by Belgravia, Bayswater, Kensington, and Haverstock Hill—suburbs with a myriad 'fancy residences of every order and dis-order of architecture ;' but after an apparently interminable drive, their cab turned down one of those quiet and narrow, gloomy but lofty old streets that

run towards the river, between Somerset House and the Temple, but nearer the latter. It had seemed to them that they would never arrive, but go on driving all night ere this destination was reached, for cabby, finding that he had a 'couple of Scots greenhorns' to deal with, who had unwisely admitted to him that they had never been in London before, had taken them through a myriad of cross streets, away round by the Marylebone Road, and then returning down Long Acre and Drury Lane, to the dull old cul-de-sac off Fleet Street. And the moment he drew up at the door of the house a ragged and miserable looking scarecrow, drenched and cadaverous, who seemed to start out of a flooded gutter, demanded in the Queen's English, but civilly enough, to be paid for opening the cab door, which Julian had opened for himself.

'What is your fare, cabman, from King's Cross here?' asked Julian.

'Twelve shillings, and sixpence hextra for the pawswells,' was the reply, with reference to their portmanteaus on the roof.

Julian knew not what was the just fare, but impressed by the vastness of London, paid it at once, and cabby vanished into the mist without delay. The boarding-house to which they had come was one recommended to the brothers on the score of economy. It was an old, red brick mansion of the days of George II., with stone corners and heavy eaves; but to their eyes the wooden stairs, the narrow lobbies, the low ceilings, and the windows flush outside with the thin walls, seemed strange and foreign and suggestive of meanness of construction, decay, and peril in case of fire; but here they were to abide till the wheel of fortune turned; and in the place there was a strange quietude and stillness by night, as it stood between the roar, bustle, and blaze of Fleet Street, and the silence of the mighty and majestic river. Their bedrooms were at the top of the edifice, and now they sat down to a moderate supper in the dining-room, where everything seemed old, faded, and worn to the last degree. On the narrow wooden mantelshelf was an old-fashioned clock, that seemed not to have gone for years; on the side table a pile of tattered newspapers left by other or departed boarders; and

the yellow blinds, the worn-out furniture—in particular a vast sepulchral-looking horsehair sofa, with black squabs—were all depressing to the sense and to the spirit; but Gerard strove to be jolly, while scanning by the dim gaslight the advertisements in a penny paper, some days old, which a small but enterprising Anglo-Saxon had sold to him as the sixth edition of that day's *Times*. Julian was very silent, and leaned his head moodily on his hand.

'Of what are you thinking?' asked Gerard; 'that the streets of London don't seem paved with gold—eh?'

'I can scarcely tell you,' replied the other wearily; 'of Kate perhaps.'

'Pho!' said Gerard, returning to his advertisement sheet; 'do you think she will be thinking of *you* in her new stately home—glorious Deloraine?'

'I trust she may be happy there—but I doubt it.'

'So do I—happy and contented, which she never could have been in dear old Fairy Knowe, even had it become entirely yours. So think of her and it no more. The past is dead and gone; but the future is before us and is all our own!'

'You were never in love, Gerard.'

'Save with my books.'

'I wonder whether you will ever be?'

'Perhaps,' replied Gerard, laughing, and little foreseeing how strange *his* love affair would be when it came to pass.

'Poet though you are, I fear you have in you the making of an old bachelor.'

'All the better, then, and if a rich one I shall leave my portion to my nephews and nieces.'

The truth is that, under all the peculiar circumstances of his being jilted and 'thrown over,' Julian Melville was beginning to have a sort of benumbed feeling in the matter, and a saddened horror of Kate. He viewed her less as his own lost love than as one—how many others had there been?—who held the place of his dead mother.

'Look here—listen,' exclaimed Gerard, suddenly; 'how lucky it is that I got this paper, old though it be by a day or two. This advertisement says "How to make an income of £10 per week, pleasantly and easily realised, without the

slightest outlay or risk. Particulars given on receipt of eighteen penny stamps."

'Ten pounds per week!' pondered Julian.

'Think of that!' exclaimed Gerard, getting writing materials at once.

'Five hundred and twenty pounds yearly, and all for eighteen stamps!'

Gerard wrote instantly in due form to the address given, as he did afterwards to others of a similar philanthropic nature; but though he waited impatiently for a reply, to his extreme surprise none ever came. His epistle consigned to the nearest post-pillar, Gerard, poetical and thoughtful, sat by the scanty, smouldering fire, beside which no poker was left to poke or rouse a blaze, and saw for himself and Julian a hundred futures in the changing embers. Then he smiled as he thought of a surprise he had in store for the latter.

'Oh, Julian,' he exclaimed suddenly, as he proceeded to light a cigar, 'could we but know the secret of success!'

'Some men have it—the lucky ones.'

'True; but what says Dryden?

"The lucky have whole days, and these they choose;
The luckless have but hours, and those they lose."

'So we must study the *hours*, Julian!'

So the hopes of making £520 per annum easily and pleasantly were canvassed again and again. Often in the days to come, and when they seemed far and hopelessly apart, did the memories of both go back sadly and affectionately to the mutual hope that filled their young and ardent hearts; the many schemes evolved, the bright but vague visions of the future that inspired their fancy on that night, their first in the gloomy boarding-house within sound of the bells of St. Clement Danes—the first night they found themselves in London—in this vast ocean, this mighty human desert, where they felt that they were but stray stones indeed! So the lads said their prayers hopefully, as they had been ever wont to do at home, kindly pressed each other's hands, and went to sleep and to dream. Dream on, handsome, dark, and ardent Julian! dream on, golden-haired and violet-eyed Gerard! the cloud that obscures your future may seem dark

and thick, but it may be lifted as a curtain by the kind hand of heaven, and let the sun of light and happiness come forth in his glory !

CHAPTER XXII.

GERARD'S SECRET.

THE next day proved bright and sunshiny, and London, with its marvels and its mightiness, looked very different to the eyes of the two wanderers from what it had done amid the fog, mist, and sloppiness of the past depressing night. Strange sounds, street cries that were puzzling, and the clang of strange church bells, all announced that they were in a new world, and when they set forth on their as yet aimless rambles in the crowded streets, the architectural splendour of the public buildings, and, even more than these, the endless lines of magnificent shops, where everything that fancy could suggest, the appetite require, or wealth and taste procure was heaped up in profusion, filled them with wonder ; and they felt how true were the words of the writer who says of London that 'in every other city there is an evident meagreness in the quantity and assortments ; but here there is the most remarkable abundance, and that not in isolated spots, but along the sides of thoroughfares miles in length. In whatever way you turn, this extraordinary amount of mercantile wealth is strikingly observable ; if you even penetrate into an alley or what you think an obscure court, then you see it in full force, and on a greater scale than in any provincial town whatsoever. It is equally obvious to the stranger that there is a dreadful struggle for business.'

To the brothers, as they looked around them, though their hearts had all the elasticity of youth, it was but too evident that there was also a 'dreadful struggle' for existence. To make money and become rich was, of course, the vague hope of both for the future ; and, ere their present store was exhausted, to put apart even a few shillings per week from a salary ; but *how* was that to be done when neither had a salary, nor the prospect of getting one without a friend, a letter of introduction or of recommendation ? In truth, they were both at the age when a young man dreams not *really* of riches ; but they were practical enough to fear want as a too

possible eventuality ; yet were not without glowing visions to shed light over a path that might not be entirely strewn with roses : for amid all the wealth and luxury around them they saw squalor and penury that were enough to chill and sicken the soul of the thoughtful. And now Gerard, with something of a blush in his soft, fair face, announced to Julian, as they rambled half in sunshine and half in shade round the cloisters of Westminster, the surprise he had in store for him—that he had written a novel !

‘A novel !’ exclaimed Julian, incredulously ; ‘when—when—about what ?’

‘Oh ! love and adventure of course. I shall be sure to get a lot of money for it !’ was the confident reply.

‘If not ?’

‘I can but fail, and we shall be no worse off than before.’

‘Of course not,’ said Julian, recovering from the flutter of surprise this unexpected announcement of his brother had caused.

‘A novel, Gerard, and what is the title ?’

‘“The Rhinns of Galloway : A Love Story ;” but I might perhaps call it “My Book of Fate.”’

‘Why ?’

‘Because my future, maybe, depends much upon its success or failure.’

‘Oh, don’t talk of failure.’

‘Why ?’

‘Because it is sure to succeed !’ exclaimed Julian, who had a loving appreciation of his brother’s talents. ‘But *when* did you write it ?’

‘In quiet hours at home, when you were away with your rod and gun, or—or——’

‘Kate,’ added Julian, as a shadow fell on his face.

‘Yes.’

‘But how came you to think of such a thing.’

‘I can’t tell how or why,’ said Gerard, with a pleasant smile. ‘The idea possessed me ; I gave way to it, conceived my plot, loved to develop it ; conceived my characters, and loved to make the puppets talk ; and sooth to say, I was sorry when the third volume was finished.’

‘It is, then, in three volumes ?’

'And may perhaps—who knows—be a little mine of wealth to us,' responded Gerard, in the growing flush of hope, confidence, and the honest pride of authorship.

Julian could scarcely think enough of this revelation, and was all impatience in his genuine love for, and admiration of, his brother, to see the matter put to the test, and find his talents—for a moment he never doubted their brilliance—were appreciated by the public. This novel might be the turning-point and the corner-stone of fortune for the brother he loved so dearly, and the beginning of—who could say nay?—a colossal fame, that should in glory outshine the mere hereditary and chance-given honours which they had lost; so Julian at once plunged into a series of golden day-dreams, to which those of Alnaschar, with his fated basket of glass, were as gloom and obscurity. The aspect of the MS. rather appalled him; he could never read even Gerard's production in that form, he thought; but the latter read to him some of his choice passages far into the hours of the night, timidly, hesitatingly, and even blushing at first, till he gathered confidence from applause that sprang from more than brotherly admiration and the desire to encourage. So it was carried *nem. con.* that in the matter of publication the field should be taken on the morrow. The morrow came, but small progress was made then, and for many days after, along the road to fame. Gerard, in his ignorance of 'the trade,' going occasionally to the wrong kind of houses for the production of such a work as his novel. Others answered him curtly—terribly so—that their hands were full, their engagements made, that novels were a drug in the market, and so forth; and many, seeing the humble address from which his letters were dated, cared not to reply at all; so gradually he began to lose heart, and to think of some other trade than that of literature, till suddenly one bibliopole desired him to send his MS. for inspection. But to Gerard the labour of so many months, the pet work of his brain, and all the more valuable now that this letter gave him new hope, seemed far too precious to be 'sent'; so he resolved to deliver it in person. He did so with a beating heart, and rejoining Julian, they walked in the parks and streets together for hours, talking of the novel—only of the novel, and full of mutual anticipations and hope on the

subject ; for if Gerard won reputation and honour, there was, in all the world, none to feel the reflection of either but Julian, for in heart and soul the brothers ever were as one. In his ardour, impatience, and, of course, ignorance of these matters, Gerard expected a letter by the next day's post ; but again days passed on and became weeks, and no tidings, either for good or evil, came from the publisher ; and again Gerard became less and less sanguine. Had they lost his precious manuscript, or had it been stolen or destroyed ? Did they deem it not worth reading, or not worth writing about ? Julian suggested that they might be modestly afraid to make him any offer for it, lest it might be far below its value, offend the author, and cause him to take 'The Rhinns of Galloway' to some more lucrative but not less appreciative house. Gerard scarcely flattered himself that this was the case, and, with a sigh, he once more joined Julian in the hopeless study of the advertisement sheets, and waiting for all manner of posts fruitlessly, till one morning a letter came, which, though curt as usual, made his heart, which had gradually been sinking into doubt and disappointment, leap within him.

It ran thus :

'MY DEAR SIR,—Your novel has met with the approval of our "Reader," who ventures to hope it may be a success, so we mean to *rush* it out at once. If you will do me the favour, call here by noon to-morrow.

'I am, my dear Sir, yours faithfully.'

Twenty times did the brothers conjointly and severally study every word of this little epistle, viewing it in every imaginable light.

'"Rush" it out, what does that mean?' asked Julian.

'To publish it at once,' replied Gerard, his cheeks aflame with genuine pleasure and ambition.

'Of course it does, dear Gerard ; but why in such haste, if this fellow he calls a "Reader" can only "*venture to hope* that it *may* prove a success?"'

'Oh, I suppose it is only a way they have of writing, to prevent people expecting too much.'

'Or to damp them, perhaps—and about the "terms" ?'

Gerard was sadly in the dark as to the value of his lucu-

brations ; but Julian, viewing all connected therewith through the medium of his great love for his brother, was full of high hope, and, in his utter ignorance of such matters, had a vague idea of great sums, or a sum certainly far beyond what Milton got for '*Paradise Lost* !' In this matter his anticipations were not shared, nor were they encouraged, by a certain jaunty individual who shared their abode, a Mr. Algernon Spangles, of one of the Strand theatres, whom the brothers, in their exultation, could not help taking into their confidence. This gentleman looked younger than his years, being closely shaven ; he was poor, as he often did the brothers the honour of borrowing a crown or so from them, which he had a difficulty in returning ; he was always in debt, o'ten in liquor ; yet, like most of his profession, he was a boon companion, full of anecdotes, and could spend his money freely when he had it ; and he brightened many an hour that to the brothers had otherwise been dull enough ; though they were often mystified by his phraseology, as much that he said was interspersed by reference to calls and casts, floats, slotes and flies, wings and gag, and so forth ; but he was always welcome to them, though he came in 'at the witching hour of night, when churchyards yawn,' and weary people too. He advised Gerard not to be too sanguine in his hopes ; but the young author was neither to be damped nor repressed now, and believed that the actor could know nothing about it ; so next forenoon, high in hope, and seeming to tread in air, Gerard set out on his travels westward, resolving that the moment the last sheets of his novel were corrected, he would set out on his mission to Wiesbaden, for now his mind had become full of that idea again.

'Good luck, dear old boy !' cried Julian, wringing his hand as he departed, while Mr. Spangles, also wishing him well, scraped a vesta on the door-post, lit a cigar of Gerard's, and smoked it with a comical and dubious expression in his washed-out face, as the author vanished into the sun-lighted Strand, and, after a time, reached the publisher's door punctually as the church clocks began to strike the hour of twelve, but with the usual wonderful variety of opinion. With a beating heart he entered the temple of literary Fate, which was situated in a quiet and unpretending street, apart from

the hubbub and bustle of the greater thoroughfares, and, as before, was surprised at the smallness and stillness of what he knew to be a fashionable and great publishing establishment. Where were all the books in gay bindings? Gerard expected to find himself in vast halls or warehouses piled to the ceilings with volumes of every sort and size, with the din of steam presses whistling about him, and sheets flying therefrom like snow. Nothing of all this was to be seen. There were but an outer and inner office; both very ill-lighted, or overshadowed by adjacent piles of buildings. In the former sat two or three young gentlemen intent on ledgers, and not at all excited when he gave his name (doubtless they knew nothing of his MS.!), and to one of these he gave his card, after which he was ushered into the presence of the bibliopole, who was usually as difficult of access as the Grand Lama of Thibet. He was seated in a room somewhat dingy in aspect, with faded furniture, and which seemed merely like the office of some merchant in a small way of business, yet thousands upon thousands were turned over there yearly. Gerard took in the whole place at a glance: the single window, with a fly-wire blind, half hiding a stable-court beyond; the busts of Dickens and Thackeray, etc., on the mantelpiece, and the writing-table littered with books, at which, in a leather easy-chair, sat a little, gentlemanly, and gentle-looking old man, with silvery hair, a bright smile, and most courteous manner.

‘Mr.—Mr.—oh, Gerard’ (looking at the card), ‘be seated; glad to see you, my dear sir; hope you are well—been long in London,’ and so forth, with many more common-places all to the same purpose, but said in a kind manner, calculated to put Gerard at his ease, soothe his present rather painful timidity, and establish confidence between them; so that in a few minutes the young man found himself quite at home. ‘And now, my dear sir, about this novel of yours,’ he resumed, causing Gerard’s pulses to quicken once more; ‘time presses, and we may as well arrange about it at once.’

‘I am so glad, sir, that it has met with your approbation.’

‘Say of my “Reader”—rather a sharp fellow, I can assure you. Money down of course cannot be thought of in your case—a beginner, my dear sir; a young writer, unaccustomed

to composition, and crude in ideas, and the risks we run in these bad times are astounding ; but here is a memorandum which I have drawn up, and which, when we come to the close of this, our first, but I hope not last, transaction, you will find perfectly to your satisfaction, as, I doubt not, it will prove to mine, my dear sir, to *mine*.'

The bibliopole placed his gold spectacles on his nose and drew a sheet of written foolscap towards him, while Gerard's fair face became a little clouded by the preamble.

'Herein I agree and promise to pay you, Mr. Gerard Melville, the sum of two hundred pounds sterling, on the sale of seven hundred and fifty copies of your work, at the end of six months from the date of publication, on the proviso that you first pay me down fifty towards the expenses of publication, because of the latter you can, of course, form no just estimate ; and of this memorandum you shall receive a signed duplicate.'

He spoke in a tone that he hoped carried conviction with it as to the great risk he ran, and the greater liberality with which he was treating the young author, whose heart, but neither his hope nor ambition, fell very low at a proposition so unexpected, so altogether unthought of, so altogether unlike all the visions in which he and Julian had been indulging, and yet which is a species of transaction done hourly and more than hourly every day in the publishing world. He thought with a pang of the gap fifty pounds would make in his limited exchequer, and after a pause, finding that the publisher, awed by his own risk, was immovable, and trusting that his interests would not be neglected—the old gentleman seemed so sweet in manner, so kind and fatherly—also fired by the longing to see the child of his brain in print and in a tangible form, and having, moreover, something of the 'never venture never win' element in his disposition, he fixed his name to the document, as also did the pleasant old bibliopole, a clerk from the next room being witness to both signatures, and the deed was done. A warm shake of the hand—a promise of 'proofs' being sent to him without delay, and Gerard Melville found himself marching once more along the Strand, a confirmed author, though embryo. What would Julian think of it all?

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE BROTHERS PART.

'How pleasantly mannered all these people are,' thought Gerard, as he walked airily homewards. The white-haired publisher seemed so fatherly, kind, and earnest that Gerard fondly thought he could perceive something of a resemblance to his venerated old grandfather, the Captain of Fairy Knowe. Of the plot or component parts of Gerard's novel we shall say nothing. It was 'rushed out' in due time and proved a decided success, especially for a beginner in literature. Julian was full of delight and enthusiasm; but he did not quite approve of the personal description of the heroine, Salome, who was described as a dark beauty of a noble, but almost Jewish type; while Julian rather affected women with auburn or red-golden hair. Gerard received his six presentation copies for 'friends.' How nice and new and fresh they looked in their bright red covers, white paper, clear type, redolent of the press and printers' ink. For 'friends'!—there was a kind of grim joke in the sound. One to Julian, another to the unappreciative yet pleased landlady; others to Mr. Algernon Spangles and a professional lady friend of his, and the circle of recipients closed. They could but hope—those two lonely brothers—that in time to come their circle would be more extended. While they were in the flush of the new book, and highly gratified by the whole event, they experienced a 'damper' on one occasion—Julian especially.

'I have always a full house when I amuse the British public,' said Mr. Spangles.

'Glad to hear it,' said Julian.

'Wait a little—full when I can issue plenty of paper. I should call myself Spangolini.'

'Why?'

'The sight-seeing Briton always prefers a foreigner. Anyway, I come out in a new piece to-night, and here are two stall orders.'

Of Mr. Spangles' performance that night Julian would have been puzzled to give any account, for he and Gerard had

barely taken their seats in the back row of the dress stalls, when Lord Deloraine and his Countess, with a brilliant party, entered one of the boxes ; and Julian felt himself grow pale. Deloraine, dark, *blasé*, yet handsome in aspect and distinguished in bearing, lounged in the back of the box with Colonel Kingsmuir ; the Countess, with her two sisters and Amy Kerr, all radiant with youth, beauty, and jewels, sat of course in front, and after depositing their bouquets on the velvet-covered coping, proceeded to sweep the house with their glasses from time to time, for the act-drop was yet down, and Julian felt his blood grow cold, for he had no desire to find himself again under the eyes of his once loved Kate. Brilliantly fair by nature, her beauty seemed to have been improved by marriage ; she was also more *aplomb* in bearing, and possessed a greater ease and elegance of manner now than she was wont to have when she and Julian rambled and rode, fished and sketched together, in Ettrick. He felt excited, and became so restless that those that sat by him began to observe his manner, and Gerard, while watching him with anxiety, said, ‘ Let us slip away.’

‘ That would attract attention, and I would rather be unobserved by her.’

‘ I do wish we had not come to-night,’ said Gerard.

‘ The theatre is as free to us as to them,’ responded his brother, sullenly, as he crossed over the stalls to look at Kate, who now lay back in her seat half out of sight.

‘ Silence !’ said one person angrily, and Julian’s dark eyes glared at him.

‘ Sit down !’ said another.

‘ Do be quiet, Julian !’ urged Gerard.

‘ Sit down !—turn him out !’

‘ Order !’ said someone else ; and Julian resumed his seat, but glancing at the British public very defiantly, for in his then mood of mind, though most anxious not to attract the least attention, he felt very much inclined to punch someone’s head.

All the past bitterness, which Julian had thought was buried if not forgotten ; all the dark details of their mother’s story and their own, came crowding back to memory as he gazed on the faces of Kate and Deloraine—his own father !—

and he sat there as one in a dream, watching the party in the box as if the group had been a phantasmagoria and not a reality—Kate remarking merely on the features of the piece, smilingly looking back and assenting to her husband, her pearl-like teeth and dark-blue eyes sparkling in the light, and her sheeny, glorious dark golden hair interwoven with strings of pearl. She seemed rippling over with smiles and brimful of happiness—burying her pretty nose sometimes amid the flowers of her magnificent bouquet, adjusting a bracelet, or making Deloraine do so, and so forth. How solidly did the place of the latter seem settled in the face of the world and of society, as compared with that of his two out-cast sons ! At last the first piece was over, and, to the intense relief of Gerard, her party rose to retire ; and mechanically Julian left the pit-stalls and hurried to the vestibule, without other object apparently than to see the departure of those he now actually hated, rather than regarded with tenderness or interest ; and Gerard hurried after him, overtaking him with difficulty among the white-kidded and opera-cloaked crowd that mingled under the portico with valets and policemen.

‘What is the use of being here?’ asked Gerard impatiently.

‘I scarcely know,’ replied Julian, in an absent manner.

‘Let us go, then. You are very foolish.’

‘Wait a little, Gerard ; here is the carriage.’

‘Lord Deloraine’s carriage !’ cried half a dozen voices in succession, as the stately vehicle, with its beautiful horses, plated harness and hammercloth, drew up to the steps ; and shrinking behind a pillar, Julian saw Kate and her sisters, and pretty Amy Kerr, handed in, while the Colonel’s brougham came up for him and his noble son-in-law.

Gerard passed his arm through that of his brother, for the strange, wistful expression of the latter’s face touched him, as the carriages rolled away.

‘How bright and beautiful she looked,’ said Julian, like one in a dream. ‘No marvel it is that I loved her once, and loved her well.’

‘I am glad to hear you talk of her thus in the past tense. As the wife of that man, she is as much lost to you as if—as if——’

'She lay in the vault where all the dead Deloraines lie : though *we* may never find a place there,' added Julian, who was in one of his bitterest moods to-night.

After this little episode their days were passed again in their usual monotony, in studying the advertisement sheets, writing many replies to the notices therein, and expending in vain a vast amount of stationery and postage stamps. Little could they guess that probably to each of those advertisements there might be a thousand hungry applicants. They mutually studied the strictest economy, dining at cheap houses in the Strand in company with the British public, paying so much a plate for dinner. Well, there was something new in it, if there was nothing more ; but Julian sometimes repined at the system, and wondered in his secret heart if a day would ever come when, as 'The Lord Hermitage,' he would even look back with a smile to this half-sordid life. But now Gerard, resolving to leave Julian to push his fortune in the great metropolis alone, resumed his favourite but most vague plan of visiting Wiesbaden. It was twenty years ago or more, now, since their mother had been there—a visitor, a mere 'bird of passage.' The period was a long one to look back to for traces ; yet go he would, and see the hotel in which she had lived as 'Lady Hermitage.' Save that point, other clue he had none for his guidance in the vague task to which he had set himself. Slow, wearisome, and hopeless it seemed ; yet Gerard, prepared for disappointment and failure, *impelled* he knew not precisely by what secret emotion, made all the arrangements for his departure. Out of his little stock Julian gave him fifty pounds to replace the sum advanced for the 'Rhynns of Galloway,' for Gerard was going to a foreign country, where unforeseen contingencies might occur ; and he gave Julian a letter to his friend, the pleasant old publisher, empowering him to receive the two hundred pounds on the sale of the novel. But their hearts grew very sad when the day of separation drew nigh, for they felt that they were so utterly alone in the world.

'My dear old fellow,' said Julian, with his hand resting caressingly on Gerard's golden hair, 'I can't help thinking that this Wiesbaden pilgrimage is a strange freak.'

'I have a singular longing to look on the scenes *her* eyes rested on, and to be where she has been. Perhaps I may pick up some tidings—I know not what.'

'If we can collect no proofs at home, are you likely to do so abroad?'

'I know not,' replied Gerard dreamily. 'I have a strong feeling about it; and failing the discovery of proofs, may pick up enough to write a book about.'

'Be careful, Gerard! You and I have been the only tie to each other since the poor old Captain died, he who was, as it were, both father and mother to us.'

'A bright future is in store for us.'

'You think so?'

'Yes,' said Gerard, confidently.

'I am beginning to lose hope,' sighed Julian.

'My dear brother, do not say so.'

And so the brothers parted amid the bustle and roar of King's Cross, where Gerard was to take the tidal train for Harwich and Rotterdam; and as Julian walked homeward through the Strand alone, he felt as if half his life had left him. Still more did he feel this as the dull days of the London spring stole on, and, homesick, he sighed for the glories of the sunrises and sunsets at home, with their luminous glow; for the shadowy sylvan scenes of Ettrick, and the deep, rich, solemn gloamings amid the vast mountains of the Southern Highlands. Meanwhile, Gerard, full of all the glowing hopes that youth and novelty inspired, could little foresee that, in the land to which he was going, there would befall him adventures strange indeed, and such as, perhaps, never before fell to the lot of any man out of a romance; but of these anon.

CHAPTER XXIV.

JULIAN'S PROFITABLE INVESTMENT.

SEPARATED now from his brother, and left utterly alone among strangers, Julian's affectionate heart was ever going back in memory to the pleasant days of their boyhood—their games, their school-days, and tasks conned together; and to an old attic in the house at Fairy Knowe, where they had

been wont to play together for hours and hours in the wet days of autumn and the stormy ones of winter. How distinctly he could recall every feature of its dusty couples and rafters, its shadowy and uncertain depths, with the roar of the rain on the tiles without ; and all the old chests, boxes, nooks, and corners of the place, with broken furniture left to rot and decay, old forgotten books, and garments, too, in which to act a ghost or Robinson Crusoe ; and as he thought of that old attic, and what an endless source of fun it had been to him and Gerard, when lingering amid the bustle of the Strand or the semi-quietude of the river-side, he felt that no rampart, not even one like the wall of China, could impart in after life the sense of security that a boy possesses under the roof-tree of his father's house ! And hour after hour he walked, in enforced idleness, as he was too long doomed to do, the streets of London, in the mere act of volition, seeking to leave thought, even reflection, yea, and the world itself, behind him ; but thought, reflection, and care came after him in all their strength, and would *not* be left behind. The sole joy that broke this monotony was an occasional letter from Gerard, who seemed, in the full flush of his first foreign travel, disposed to loiter by the way at Rotterdam and elsewhere ; but as day followed day, Julian grew heartsick of idleness, and the awful solitude of being *alone* in London, till one day his flagging spirits received a fillip after an advertisement caught his eye.

'Here is the very thing for me,' thought he ; 'but of course there will be ten thousand replies to it.'

'*Wanted*, a gentleman—young preferred—with from £50 to £100, to take a share in a most lucrative and gentlemanly business. Apply, Messrs. Hookitt and Pawsey,' etc.

'By Jove ! I'll try this. Never venture, never win !'

Writing, he received an immediate reply to call on Messrs. Hookitt and Co. He put the notes in his pocket-book, and full of hope, though his funds were waxing low indeed, set out at once in search of the given address, fearful only that he might be anticipated by others, and full of hope that he should ere long be able to give Gerard a brilliant account of his success. But in what, he knew not. To seek the source of the advertisement, Julian had to penetrate into a region to

him before unknown. A district consecrated, apparently, more peculiarly than any other, to moneymaking and the worship of the Golden Calf, but not far from London Bridge. Into that vortex which draws together men of every nation and creed, and those who have neither creed nor nation, nor any instinct save money-worship. He had to thread his way through a labyrinth of back-slums, narrow streets where the sunlight never came to absorb the mud, between gigantic piles of dingy and hideous-looking stores, where, slung in air, bales went up and barrels came down, amid the rattle of chains, the squeak of blocks and pulleys ; and where great lumbering draymen swore and chaffed, chaffed and swore, by turns ; and he thought with Cowper that truly

‘ God made the country and man made the town.’

At last he reached a dingy little office, the whole frontage of which was occupied by a small window and smaller door, on the jamb of which appeared the name of the firm, ‘ Hookitt and Pawsey ;’ and he entered with a beating heart, and in no way crushed by the mean and meagre aspect of the place, for he had learnt enough of London life to know that the aspect or size of an office was no criterion of the amount of business transacted there, or the money made.

Several old ledgers lay on an ink-spotted desk ; two stools stood thereby ; but there were no clerks ; they were evidently out on business, for their pens lay by their ink-horn ; but a voice from an inner den called, ‘ Come in.’ So, hat in hand, Julian entered, to find himself received by a sleek-looking, well-fed, well-dressed, and pleasantly-mannered man, with a somewhat aquiline cast of features, thick, dark, well-oiled hair, a thick, dark beard, keen eyes, and a rubicund visage. He seemed about thirty years of age, wore a species of very dark green cutaway coat, a crimson necktie, and displayed at his vest some handsome jewellery. All these details Julian was enabled to take in at leisure, as on his entrance this personage half wheeled round the old tattered easy-chair in which he sat, and said, with a wave of the hand, ‘ One moment, my dear sir. Excuse me, but I am just glancing at the money article in the *Times*. Ah, ah ! dare say you’ll be glad to hear that the markets are firm, sir—firm.’

Then, as if by force of habit, he winked ; Julian knew not why. The latter, bowing, said, 'A fine morning, sir.'

'A novel and original remark,' replied the other ; 'but it *is* a fine morning.'

'I called with reference to your advertisement,' began Julian, in a hesitating manner, and colouring very much as he spoke.

'Glad to see you, young man,' exclaimed the other, extending a thick coarse hand, on which were several great rings of very Ballarat aspect. 'Mr. Melville?' Julian bowed. 'I am Mr. Hookitt. Now then, what do *you* want?' he suddenly demanded of a flashy-looking young fellow who looked in.

'Instructions, Mr. Hookitt, please.'

'I shall expect you at the head office to-morrow ; there our manager will give you some idea of the delivery-book, petty cash, and all that sort of thing.'

'Thank you, sir,' replied the youth, and passed through the outer office with his forefinger at the side of his nose.

'And now to business, my dear sir,' said Mr. Hookitt, removing his hat, which hitherto he had been wearing, and considerably over the right eye. 'You can give us references, of course?'

Julian hesitated and coloured painfully. His only friend in London, Mr. Algernon Spangles, would scarcely do ; so he said, 'I am a stranger in London, but I can give you that which is better than a reference—the money required.'

'We are general merchants and shippers,' said Mr. Hookitt, as a little smile rippled over his rather shiny face. 'Small place this as yet ; our private office ; but our chief establishment is within a few minutes' walk of London Bridge. My partner, Mr. Pawsey—Aminadab Pawsey—is a well-known member of the Society of Friends ; but you have heard of him, I presume?'

Julian had not the pleasure.

'Supposed to be the next Lord Mayor. Great man, Pawsey, and most charitable, though he complains that everybody in the world is too fond of credit. His son, Jonadab Pawsey, is our chief agent and collector—pockets a salary of seven hundred a year. Should prefer *you*, sir, for that office : good

appearance, gentlemanly manner ; hope to see you in it when Jonadab is promoted. Oh, who knows ?

‘ You are very kind.’

‘ Not at all—not at all,’ replied Mr. Hookitt, running his pudgy fingers through his well-oiled locks ; ‘ you Scotsmen always succeed in London, as everywhere else—national honesty, thrift, perseverance, strict spirit of honour, and all that sort of thing. Any way, we shall be glad of say, £100 from you as a guarantee for it all,’ added Mr. Hookitt, laughing, and trying to untie the wire of a champagne flask ; ‘ and you shall get a liberal percentage thereon, in addition to your salary—say forty pounds to start with, and fifty next year. These terms we should increase, of course, if you could chuck in another hundred.’

Julian shook his head, and his spirit sank at the proffered salary ; but then, on the other hand, he had heard of great premiums required, and long service given gratis.

‘ We speculate boldly, my dear sir—dear boy, let me call you,’ continued Mr. Hookitt, as he handed a tumbler of the sparkling wine to Julian and filled another for himself ; ‘ I am old enough to be your father, you know.’

‘ Not quite, Mr. Hookitt.’

‘ Ah, you flatter me.’

‘ No, no—thanks,’ said Julian, as his glass was refilled.

‘ Well, I am on the wrong side of thirty, and have seen a deal of life in the world—and out of it.’

(He had, indeed, enjoyed some years of industrious seclusion.)

‘ Oh, you Scotsmen, you Scotsmen, are knowing fellows ! but, as I said before, we speculate boldly—too boldly, perhaps, for your taste ; but we have quick returns and make heaps of money ; a little time and we may literally *coin* it.’ And he laughed heartily as he spoke.

But it never occurred to Julian, in his profound ignorance of such matters, that his hundred pounds, in such a vast commercial concern as that of Messrs. Hookitt and Pawsey, must be but as a drop in the river Thames.

‘ Latin and Greek, of course, you Scotsmen, even your parish schoolboys, pick up,’ resumed Mr. Hookitt, who seemed to have time enough to dwell on indifferent matters ;

'but they are all rubbish in the City ; *figures* stand at A 1 with Hookitt and Pawsey, as well as at Lloyd's.'

It is strange that his rather fulsome manner did not strike Julian ; but manner *is* a pleasant thing, and he felt actually flattered.

'The romance of life don't appertain much to us, sir,' said Mr. Hookitt, sighing, as he imbibed another sparkling beaker. 'I have discovered that, after years passed at the cold, stern, and monotonous ledger ; but they made me the man I am, sir—the man I am !'

Some dry sherry and a biscuit were now produced, and, after much friendly hilarity, Julian handed over his hundred pounds in notes, receiving a receipt therefor in the names of 'Hookitt and Pawsey,' but not on the official paper of the firm, as that was all up at the head office, or had been expended at the branch wherein he was then seated ; and the giver begged him to be particularly careful of it as his voucher, and Julian placed the packet containing it away in the depths of his breast-pocket.

'And is it coming to this?' he thought, despite the sherry, which had rendered his brain a little cloudy, as he looked through the dirty panes of the window into a small yard beyond, where lay an old rotten cask, some empty bottles, and wet straw, on which a bloated rat was nestling ; 'after all my wild and high aspirations, after—after I scarcely know what ? To spend the hours of each long, long day in the firm of Hookitt and Pawsey over the chest-aching desk, amid the roar and bustle of this great hotbed of splendour and squalor, wealth and starvation !'

Julian had most hazy ideas of the work to be done, or what was expected of him, in sharing 'the lucrative and gentlemanly business ;' but the senior partner seemed a pleasant fellow, and he could but put his trust in Providence and hope for the best.

"Procrastination is the thief of time," as the copybooks have it,' resumed Mr. Hookitt, after another glass of sherry, 'and time is money, sir ; time wasted is never regained. You must, of course, keep up to the scratch, Mr. Melville, with Hookitt and Pawsey.'

'I shall do my utmost, sir.'

‘That is right ; another glass of sherry. And you couldn’t throw in another fifty?’

‘Impossible.’

‘Well, you’ll never regret having a stool in our house. Business has made many an English gentleman, sir, before and after the time of Dick Whittington and Sir Thomas Gresham. Figures for a man who wants to get on in this world—thought, calculation, energy—all the special virtues of your countrymen, sir.’

Julian bowed.

‘And now, sir,’ said Mr. Hookitt, as his visitor assumed his hat, gloves, and umbrella, ‘when you are a little time in our establishment, you must allow me to put your name up as a future member of our club.’

‘With pleasure, if I can afford it.’

‘Afford it ! my dear sir ; of course you will be able to afford it by that time. A pleasant social community it is.’

‘And how named ?’

‘The “Wide-awake Club,”’ he replied, with a loud laugh.

‘A thousand thanks.’

‘Don’t oversleep yourself, my dear Mr. Melville, but come to business betimes ; nine sharp, to-morrow morning ;’ and with an impressive shake of the hand—a veritable wring thereof—Mr. Hookitt permitted Julian to take his departure.

Julian thought deeply over the past interview as he walked homeward by Fleet Street. It was a depressing prospect, compared with his earlier hopes and anticipations, to spend all the best of his years in a gloomy counting-house ; yet it seemed to be the fate of thousands who were jolly enough over it ; and as to his hopes of ever being Lord Hermitage, they had utterly faded out or been forgotten after the departure of Gerard.

‘Well, well, I shall no doubt be rich and a partner some day yet, God help me,’ thought Julian, ‘and now, is not anything—anything better than the heartless, hopeless life of painful and aching uncertainty I have been leading of late?’

Mr. Hookitt was not exactly the *beau idéal* of a gentleman ; but he seemed a good sort of fellow, and so inclined to praise Scotsmen. What did he mean ?

‘He is a right good fellow, any way, and I am in luck!’

thought Julian ; and full of this conviction, that he might be fresh for business in the morning, he went to bed betimes. He would write to Gerard of his good fortune—at least, of the new vista which had been so suddenly opened up to him ; and he lay nearly the whole night awake, full of happy imaginings, of brilliant thoughts, of an easy and perhaps wealthy, if inglorious, future—waking dreams that were never to be realised.

We think we need scarcely inform the reader of the crushing sequel. At the address given him, near London Bridge, no such persons as Hookitt and Pawsey had ever been heard of, and on seeking the 'branch office,' which had been the scene of his interview on the preceding day, he found the shutters up, the little doorway closed, and both covered by the undisturbed posters of the bill-sticker over night ; and then the conviction came home to him that he had been swindled, and his hundred pounds, more than the half of all he possessed in the world, were gone for ever ! Two or three other young men, whom he met examining the silent premises and making similar inquiries, had all been 'done' in the same fashion, but at different hours, and they were loud in denouncing Hookitt, and in wishing Julian to join them in an application to the police ; but he turned away in disgust, a wiser man than he was yesterday. He now saw what a prodigious fool he had been to suppose that his hundred pounds, though a vast sum to him, could have been any object to a firm whose junior partner was supposed to be the next Lord Mayor ! Hookitt must have thought him, and found him, the most simple of all simple gudgeons : so Julian came to the conclusion that though the pill he had swallowed, and the experience won, were both bitter, he had better commit the whole affair to oblivion ; but the loss he had suffered added greatly and rapidly to the desperation of his circumstances. Yet, for a time, in his gloomy lodgings, he could not help brooding over the affair, while emotions of alarm, agitation, passion, and a natural desire for vengeance, swayed him by turns. Had Mr. Algernon Spangles been at hand to advise him, the whole affair would, no doubt, never have happened ; but that individual had fallen into arrears

of rent, or made an engagement in the provinces—any way he had dropped for the time out of Julian's orbit. But the disgusts of the latter were not yet over.

'Robbed though I have been,' thought he, 'I shall have to avail myself of a few pounds ere long from Gerard's two hundred, now due—I know the dear fellow would give me the whole sum if I required it.'

And so, as the six months had now more than expired, in confidence, and full of love for his brother, and gratitude for what that brother's talents must have won them both, he took with him the letter of Gerard, and repaired to the publisher, concerning the sale of the novel.

The bibliopole was engaged, of course, but Julian saw his manager, rather a snappish party. The state of sale *had* been made up, but as the required number of copies given in the duplicate memorandum had *not* been sold, so far from having anything to pay, the firm had been greatly out of pocket by the whole unfortunate transaction.

'After all those brilliant and favourable reviews!' exclaimed Julian, positively aghast.

'Those,' replied the manager, laughing at his bewilderment, 'too often have nothing whatever to do with the success of, or monetary return for, a book; and so far as reviews go, there are a great many wheels within each other in that matter.'

'Surely there has been some mistake!' exclaimed Julian, hotly.

'A great mistake, indeed.'

'How?'

'On our part, in publishing the work of an unknown author. Good morning, my dear sir.'

And Julian, politely bowed out, found himself again traversing the sunny streets, with a wiser head, but a heavier heart.

CHAPTER XXV.

TRIALS AND STRUGGLES.

IN its very monotony, time passed quickly with Julian. He had now seen London—the vast metropolis—the capital of

Europe—under all its phases, and in the gloom of his heart and of his circumstances, we fear that he was beginning to loathe it, and to wish to leave it ; but for where? He had seen it in the early days of spring, when snow and sleet make cold and desolation everywhere ; he had seen it, outwardly at least, amid the bustle and crowd of ‘the season,’ when the streets, the parks, and the Row are in all their glory ; he had seen it in the utter emptiness of July and August, when white dust powders every shrub and tree ; and anon in winter, when the vast thoroughfares were slippery with ice, or were alternately deep with snow and mud—mud and snow—till the sloppiness became dark and thick, and greasy as treacle ; while overhead, and even against one’s face, was the dense fog, yellow as pea soup, rendering mid-day dark, and respiration well-nigh impossible. And amid all these changes, he had ever one futile longing to be back again among the grassy glens, the breezy hills, and clear trouting streams of his home ; and never was this feeling stronger than when he found himself wandering alone, by night, in the abandoned streets, which, in their mightiness, looked doubly desolate with their long lines of glimmering gas-lamps. Doubtless he viewed everything through a false and distorted medium ; the shadow of the past often fell across the present, rendering the latter gloomier still, when Julian indulged in the dark dreamland of reverie.

Julian spent his little store not very wisely, even after the two tricks that had been practised upon him and Gerard. Honourable, simple, and kind-hearted, he was easily imposed upon by the cunning and the simulated sorrows of the apparently unfortunate ; and as his funds ebbed, to practise economy he had to take a cheaper room in the boarding-house, ascending from floor to floor, till he was under the very tiles at last, and the fancied brightness of his future was fast fading out. On the strength—small though it was—of his grandfather’s name and services, Julian waited on certain Scottish peers and Members of Parliament, leaving cards for them again and again (he had speculated in a hundred, including the plate, for a few shillings), in the vague hope that they might kindly do ‘something’ for him. But in this profitless pilgrimage he only wasted much time and shoe-

leather, and encountered many bitter mortifications. Each and all seemed as inaccessible as the Emperor of China, and he was often compelled to wait long in stately lobbies and draughty corridors by scrutinising 'flunkies,' who superciliously inquired his business, or told him, in the same tone, that he must communicate it in writing, till he abandoned the task in utter disgust and bitterness of heart, and thought how different it would all be could he have announced himself to these powdered and pampered valets as 'the Lord Hermitage,' and held that position, the dream of achieving which had so unaccountably lured Gerard away to Germany. But about this time chance threw Julian in the way of two 'noble' friends, who nearly proved his destruction, or at least disgrace, by the snare they prepared for him. Lingered one evening in the Burlington Arcade during a shower, he was suddenly accosted by a fashionable-looking young fellow who had passed him two or three times, while promenading to and fro, watching the lighting up of the tiny shops on either hand, filled with pretty trifles.

'Can you oblige me with a cigar-light?' said the stranger.

'With pleasure,' replied Julian.

'Ah—thanks—a countryman of mine, I think,' said the other, lighting the cigar that protruded from a handsome and well-trimmed moustache.

'Perhaps so,' replied Julian; 'but I should not think so from your accent.'

'Ah—but I know it from *yours*. Now, what part of Scotland do you come from?' he asked, in an insinuating tone.

'Ettrick.'

'Hettrick—never heard of it before.'

'That is singular—it is a great and well-known district in the south country.'

'Ah—my property lies chiefly in Ayrshire—I dare say you've heard of me—Lord Carmylie?'

Julian never *had* heard of the title; but certainly it had a Scottish sound about it, so he bowed and lifted his hat, and was about to pass, when his lordship said: 'Don't be in a hurry; the shower is not yet over.'

So Julian remained, and at that moment a little 'tiger,' sprucely and perfectly dressed, with cockade and waist-belt,

came up with some message from 'Lady Carmylie,' and giving his master what seemed to Julian rather a palpable wink, passed out of the arcade.

'A saucy young dog that,' said Lord Carmylie; 'but you can have no idea how London spoils all that class. Have you been long in town?' he added, with friendly interest.

This lured Julian into saying more of himself than he was in the habit of admitting to strangers, and he hinted that he was in search of some appointment.

'Such a thing is difficult to get,' said his lordship, with a pleasant smile; 'but nothing can be got without trial, and the perseverance of you—I mean of *we*—Scotsmen is proverbial. May I ask your name?'

'Melville—Julian Melville.'

'Ah, here comes my friend, Lord Campbell—Campbell, Mr. Melville, a countryman of ours.'

'Glad to meet you, sir—hope you are tidy,' said the new comer, who was by no means so *distingué* in appearance as Lord Carmylie, but had very much the air and aspect of a groom out of livery; he was coarse-featured, closely shaven, wore his hat well down over his brow, and kept his eyes keenly fixed upon Julian, while solacing himself by sucking a twig.

'We are just going to have a glass of wine—will you join us, Mr Melville?' asked Lord Carmylie.

'Just a glass of fizz,' added Lord Campbell.

'Thanks,' replied Julian, giving an angry glance at the gate-keeper, who had been scrutinising him and his two new acquaintances with what seemed a very decided air of impertinence, and they walked forth together.

'How lucky!' thought Julian; 'here is a young Scottish noble, certainly not much older than myself, who seems a friendly kind of fellow, without a bit of titled snobbery about him, and who may be able to serve me in some fashion, thank heaven!'

'Which way?' asked the peer.

'Oh—the old bunk, of course,' replied Lord Campbell, dropping his twig as he laughed aloud, and in another minute Julian found himself seated in the long and stately dining-room of a very handsome restaurant.

After the more than faded gentility—the squalor—of the

boarding-house near the river, the aspect of this great apartment, with its gilded cornices, and crystal gasaliers, marble tables with bronze pedestals, whereat gentlemen and ladies, some of the latter without bonnets, were lunching or dining on every delicacy, the soft carpets, the gentlemanly waiters gliding noiselessly about, napkin on arm, the popping of champagne corks, the hum of well-bred and modulated voices, with occasional little rings of laughter, made up to Julian's eyes and ears a delightful whole, and amid many pleasant commonplaces and references to certain improvements then in progress on the estates of Carmylie, a bottle of sparkling Moselle was speedily imbibed by the trio.

'Well, Campbell,' said the peer, after a pause, 'how is the Dook ?'

'The Dook is as hearty as a buck, though I don't think he can jump so high—have another bottle of cham, my lord.'

'Thanks, yaas—just one, though, really.'

Julian certainly thought 'Lord Campbell's' general style and appearance rather strange, and he became very uncomfortable when there was a proposal to adjourn to the next room, where they might have 'a little mild play,' or have a shy at pool and pyramid. Remembering the state of his exchequer, Julian was not ashamed, with men of their rank, to decline frankly, adding that he 'never played ;' an announcement which caused the two noblemen to exchange furtive smiles, and elevate their eyebrows. Julian detected this ; he feared that perhaps he had committed a mistake, or a solecism, and coloured deeply, while his vague sense of discomfort increased ; but on more wine being proposed, he begged to be excused, and rose to withdraw.

'Going already !' exclaimed Lord Carmylie, 'and before we have exchanged cards.'

'I must leave, my lord,' said he, pleadingly.

'Well—ere you go, do me the favour to get this note exchanged at the bar, while I go over my betting-book with Campbell,' said the peer, giving a bank-note to Julian, who bowed, and took it mechanically.

'It is a ten-pounder,' said my Lord Campbell.

Julian, as he passed through the room, saw that it was a ten-pound note ; but his quick eye—all ignorant as he was of such matters—saw more : that it was on the 'Bank of Elegance,'

not England. He paused, grew pale with astonishment and honest indignation on finding that he had been deceived by a couple of sharpers, who must have taken him for a simpleton indeed. Returning to them at once, he threw the note on the table.

‘Hullo, what’s the row?’ asked Lord Carmylie, looking up from his betting-book; ‘if anything is wrong, keep it dark.’

‘Ain’t you going to get the flimsy changed?’ added Lord Campbell, with sulky surprise.

‘I shall leave that to your lordships,’ replied Julian; ‘and be thankful,’ he added, in a voice loud enough to be heard nearly all over the room, ‘that I do not hand you and your note over to the police!’

He put on his hat, grasped his cane defiantly, and instantly quitted the place; but not quick enough to avoid hearing a sudden roar and a scuffle behind him, and to see the two noble friends brought forth in the hands of the police, who had been tracking them. He hurried away from the locality as fast as he could; and still faster would he have gone, had he known what was to be stated in the prints of the following day, with reference to a row in the restaurant, and arrest of two well-known swindlers—that a *third* had been seen with them, for whom ‘the police were now actively in search!’ Though this is a phrase in general use with reference to such, and to much more serious affairs, it sounded to poor Julian like a dreadful note of alarm, and thus for days he avoided the locality where he had met the so-called lords, and, indeed, the whole of the West End, dreading arrest for complicity with whom, or what, he knew not.

A constant source of anxiety to Julian was the brevity and scarcity of Gerard’s letters. His mind seemed strangely pre-occupied, but with what? Had he fallen in love with some fair-skinned and blue-eyed *fräulein*, all unlike the Salome of his novel? Julian feared it, his letters were so short, so strangely expressed, and so dreamy. He was compelled to let Gerard know of how he had been bubbled by Mr. Hookitt and the bookseller, but said nothing of other disappointments, and the too probable approach of want, lest such a narrative should cause his affectionate brother sorrow or distress.

‘I have left my old life behind me and for ever, dear

Gerard,' wrote Julian; 'will any sunshine or brightness ever come into the new? I often think this hopeless existence cannot last for ever; it is a long lane that has no turning, you would say, but many must have gone through, and many may be now undergoing, the same trials that are now mine. Last night I dreamt we were at home in Ettrick, where the vault of heaven is blue, indeed, by day, bluer still by night; where the unshorn stars come out in their northern glory; where the woods rustle their foliage pleasantly in the breeze, and the birds are carolling aloft. We were fishing, I thought, in the Dowie Dens of the Yarrow, where the alder and the larch trees dip their branches in the stream, and Kate came smiling to join us. A tumult of joy filled my heart; all that has passed since those days seemed then a *dream*, within a dream: but I awoke to reality, to life, to the horror of a squalid London lodging-house, where everything seemed strange and foreign to my eye, so faded and sordid that I thought I should have died, and, but for the thought of you, only wished to do so.'

Julian sometimes regretted the enforced melancholy tone of his letters, and had doubts if they always reached Gerard, whose answers were so few and far between; but, sooth to say, his own motions were so various and so errant now, and the abodes to which he was compelled to resort so obscure, that they could only correspond with growing difficulties; for with the luckless Julian, 'the Lord Hermitage' of his brother's enthusiastic hopes, even the grim farce of shabby gentility was fast being played out now! He had already known what it was to take a promenade in lieu of a dinner, and go without a fire in his tiny grate during the cold weather, on the plea that his room was already too warm, though his teeth chattered as he said so to the astonished smut-faced servant-of-all-work; and his diminished wardrobe became so threadbare and worn, that when by mere force of habit, he ventured westward into the parks or the Row, where the spoiled children of wealth, fashion, and folly were driving or riding past in thousands, he became painfully conscious that the constables on duty kept their eyes upon him, he seemed so homeless and aimless. One day he suddenly found himself close to a magnificent barouche in the park, and the

familiar arms on the panels, *or* a bend *azure*, a star between two crescents, the coronet and the supporters, two maidens in antique habits, gave him a species of electric shock, and he sprang back ; but two brilliantly fair faces in the vehicle met his eye : Kate in all her beauty, and another lovely girl, Amy Kerr of Kershope, a blonde of the most attractive type, who half started from her seat and exclaimed :

‘ Kate, Kate ! Good heavens ! there is Julian Melville, or his spectre rather !’

He heard the excited girl’s voice, and turning, mingled with the crowd beyond the rails, and almost fled from the spot, resolving never to venture there again, while fierce anger came into his heart.

‘ My father—my father !’ thought Julian, as he leant breathlessly and faint against a tree ; ‘ oh, must I curse and hate him for ever ? No, no ; nothing lasts for ever, here at least, thank God !’

He was faint from want of food, and all the Row seemed to be whirling round him ; yet into his pale face there came the haughty and dark Deloraine expression, and the Deloraine blood, that he dared not claim, came bubbling up in his veins. Amid the whirl of life through which Kate, as a Countess, was now passing—a succession of London seasons, varied by gay circles of friends at Deloraine and elsewhere ; presentations at Court, drums and drawing-rooms, pleasures and honours, the pale and ghastly face of Julian Melville, as she saw it for an instant in the Row, cost her a terrible pang. She knew that she had wronged him terribly and sadly, but had hoped he would get over it, he was so young ; yet she little knew, in wronging him, whose place she had taken, how much more sadly and terribly he was wronged by the Earl, her husband, and that the latter, if he ever thought of his existence, only did so with a species of resentment and rancour that was implacable, and somewhat resembling that which Dr. Johnson describes the infamous Anne, Countess of Macclesfield, cherishing towards her son, the luckless Richard Savage. By the time his last stage of misery was reached, Julian had begun to contemplate the chances of his becoming an inmate of one of those dreadful courts or pestilent alleys that lie in the vicinity of Holborn—

where the concentrated squalor and destitution of the English capital may be seen in full force ; or, worse still, if possible, those horrible abodes of profligacy, villainy, intoxication, and hydra-headed vice, near St. Clement Danes or Chancery Lane. The anticipation of such a fate filled him with horror, and he thought he would rather anticipate it under the quiet, muddy flow of the river. But there was the absent Gerard ; could he leave him alone in the world ? He often endured these heavy fits of depression, which are so maddening, especially to those who, like himself, are utterly friendless ; and once, when his last coin had gone, and he was contemplating the still flow of the river, gliding past in the long rippling lines of gaslight, he was impressed, as if by a sentence of death, on hearing one wayfarer say to another : ‘ Yes—yes—poor devils whose lives are hopeless are indeed better out of this world than in it.’

‘ Hopeless, indeed, is mine !’ muttered Julian, as he bent his haggard eyes and desperate thoughts upon the refuge before him. It was to take one headlong plunge, and all would be over !

And then, as there flashed upon his memory all the cases of nameless and unknown suicides he had heard of, there came something slowly floating past, alternately lost to sight and seen again in long lines of misty radiance that crossed the river. Anon it was almost below his eyes, and he shuddered as, amid the ooze, a drowned corpse went past—a corpse that doubtless would never reach the sea. It fascinated his eyes, till it rose, and then sank finally, to all appearance, amid the eddies caused by a huge dredging machine, that was splashing close by with its mud-laden chain of iron buckets, and casting weird gleams from its engine lights upon the seething water. Then Julian turned and literally fled from the spot. That night, an autumn one, he actually slept under a tree in Hyde Park, but long before sleep closed his eyes he lay watching the lighted windows of a stately mansion, past which the shadowy figures of the dancers flitted, and from whence came the strains of music, amid the incessant roll of arriving and departing carriages ; and while he gazed and listened, till weariness and want overcame him, he knew not that he was looking at the town

residence of the Earl of Deloraine. Roused betimes by a surly park-keeper, he resumed his aimless wandering, and hourly felt more than ever convinced that this dull and heartless vagabondising could not last much longer. It should not lead him to crime, but assuredly it might lead him to death! Wandering on, he knew not, cared not, whither—aware only that pride would neither abate nor in any way satisfy the cravings of hunger—a man ran against him.

‘I beg your pardon,’ said Julian faintly.

‘I beg yours! Hullo—by Jove—but you do seem down on your luck!’ exclaimed the other.

‘Spangles!’

‘Spangles it is—Algernon Spangles; but, as usual, at very low water.’

It was evident that the happy-go-lucky actor was in somewhat dilapidated circumstances, as the state of his attire indicated, yet it was princely as compared with that of Julian, who in a few words told him his miserable story. The eyes of the light comedian grew moist, for he had all the generosity which is a characteristic of his profession. Drawing off a woefully worn and tattered kid glove, he thrust a hand far down into the pocket of his rather frayed trousers, saying, in the words of the player: “Come forth, you blackguard—evasion is useless! Here is the last sovereign that reigns in my dominions; but you are welcome to the half of it, Melville.”

Julian protested against this. He saw that Spangles was in low funds; his tightly buttoned surtout, with buttons incomplete, his frayed and turned paper collar and napless hat, showed this, though his bearing was jaunty, pleasant, and gentlemanly as ever.

‘Nonsense!’ exclaimed the actor. ‘I borrowed from you often enough when you had it to lend; oblige me now by borrowing from me, when I have it to lend.’

‘I know not how, or when, I may be able to return even this accommodation,’ said Julian, with a very full heart.

‘It won’t matter if you never return it at all; and if not to me, lend it to some other poor devil, and tell him to send it on, and perhaps it may come back to me in time. So, so—you cannot work, and to beg you are ashamed.’

‘Nay, nay, far from it, if I got aught to work at, that I was able to do.’

‘Try the stage ; “All the world’s a stage,” et cetera.’

‘I am unfit for it.’

‘Not in appearance, certainly.’

‘In talent then,’ said Julian, meekly.

‘There is not much talent wanted in the super line ; at least, to fight at Bosworth, and march to Dunsinane. Look me up at the stage door ; there is an early call to-day, and I must be off like a bird—so ta-ta, old fellow.’

‘To fight !’ thought Julian, as his friend left him, and he turned away in search of food, feeling more than ever humiliated and crest-fallen. ‘Yes—I shall fight ; but not as a puppet on the mimic stage of war,’ he added aloud, as an old idea occurred to him.

Often, when rambling in the vicinity of Westminster, had the placards and beer-shop harangues of the Sergeant Kites who affect that locality attracted keenly his consideration, and occasioned him much thought, as he rambled by night along the stately streets, with ever and anon the solemn boom of Big Ben in his ears ; and now these thoughts took tangible form.

‘The future—the future !’ he muttered aloud, for he was always so much alone that he was apt now to commune with himself ; ‘what would life, even in age, be without it ? The present, with all its joys and prosperity, or its bitterness and humiliation, we know ; but the future, the chief inheritance of the ardent and the luckless, is so full of the uncertain, and always inspires hope. To become a soldier for good !’ he added, as his pale cheek coloured ; ‘it was not in this spirit, or in this mood of desperation, my forefathers drew their swords, but needs must now. I shall cease to be my own master ; I shall never be able to go to poor Gerard, but he may come to me, wherever I am ; and who can foresee, save One, when or how my career is to *end* !’

And in this mood he resolutely bent his steps towards Westminster.

CHAPTER XXVI.

GERARD MEETS WITH AN ENIGMA.

MEANWHILE, and before fortune had reached its gloomiest point with Julian, how was it faring with Gerard on that mission which he had undertaken, inspired and impelled by the vague desire of doing something for their mother's honour, and the assertion of his brother's true position in the world? At Harwich he had taken the steamer for Rotterdam, and as she steamed out past the Bell Buoy, he had seen the last rays of the set sun fade redly out on Landguard Fort, and lastly on the great martello tower, the largest in England, that crowns the cliff above the town; and when at twelve miles' distance the harbour lights died out, he felt that he had fairly bade good-bye to home, and the novelty of travel filled his mind—youthful, dreamy, and elastic—with emotions of happiness and pleasure, though the ardour of these was soon to be somewhat marred by the heavy rolling of the ship. Hence, as Gerard was no sailor, he felt supreme satisfaction when, with early morning, he found her ploughing the yellow, muddy waters of the Maese, and he was informed that the coast of Holland was on both sides; for some time he looked in vain for the said coast, till on mounting the bridge he saw some fringes of pale green willows, rising, as it appeared, directly out of the water. Anon some windmills and church spires, but all seeming at a vast distance, began to appear, and Gerard beheld with a mountaineer's eye, and with growing bewilderment, the wondrous flatness of the land, which in some places seemed to be lower than the sea; yet these were the famous 'Lowlands o' Holland,' the theme of many a Scottish military song of love and exile. The low sandy bank that runs like a spit into the sea, the Hoek van Holland, on the left hand, was left far astern; the town of Brielle, on the right bank, was soon passed, and by that time Gerard found the steamer suddenly in possession of the Dutch Customs officers, swarthy, bearded, and rough-looking fellows in blue military uniform, and in due time the vessel, after running twenty miles up the river, ran close along the Boompjes, as a stately row of houses that face the

Maese are named from their bordering row of now giant elm-trees. All the bustle of a great quay adjoining a railway station was there—a roar of most conflicting sounds ; laden porters jostling, seamen shouting, vehicles of every description skurrying or lumbering to and fro ; bales of goods from, or bound for, every part of the world ; myriads of casks and boxes to be taken into, or just taken out of, the *Lieue, Oude, and Nieuwe havens*, which open into each other ; the strange-looking city of red fantastic brick houses, that seemed to consist of as many canals as streets ; the singular conglomeration of trees and ships, hedges and water—water everywhere—with the square cathedral spire towering over all : and there Gerard Melville found himself standing by the *Boompjes* with a portmanteau in his hand, most painfully conscious that he was a stranger, and a very bewildered one, rather unsteady afoot too, as he seemed still to feel the roll of the ship.

'*Hotel des Pays Bas, Mynheer,*' said a hoarse voice in his ear, as a porter confronted him and pointed to a great edifice on the Quai near the steamer.

'*Hotel-scheepershuis, Spaanesche Kade !*' bellowed a second, with one hand at his brass-bound cap and the other resolutely on Gerard's portmanteau ; and so energetic was this personage that he felt bound to accompany him, having somehow an idea that the caravansari last named would be the most inexpensive of the two. If Gerard had felt lonely in London, he felt lonelier still in Rotterdam, for he was without the society of Julian, and the language of the people sounded harsh and barbarous, yet they were polite, kind and hospitable. He soon felt himself thus 'at home,' as it were, but resolved, after seeing all that was worth seeing in the city, to push on for Wiesbaden. But as he sat at breakfast in the recess of a great latticed window, gazing on the view without, he had that dull and vague sense of the unreality of all he looked on, an emotion consequent on the rapidity of steam travel now. At the same hour yesterday he had been with Julian in their dull lodging between Fleet Street and the Thames ; now he was looking out on a Dutch thoroughfare, of the days of De Witt and Cortenzaer, with gables facing the street, and overhanging their foundations by many a foot ;

where carts ran on sledges, not wheels ; where the peasants clattered about in sabots, and the women wore huge coifs and ram's-horn shaped earrings ; where the brass milk-pails shone like burnished gold, and a fantastic-looking little reflecting mirror was placed before the windows of every house, and where water and water-craft, the masts and yards of shipping, met the eye at every turn, as if the whole city were half orchard and half dockyard. He longed for a companion with whom he might exchange his thoughts, as he set forth to see the city ; but ere long his thoughts were fated to have a companion of whom he had as little knowledge as the power that her idea—for at first it was a mere *idea*—was to have over him and his action. He rapidly 'did' all the lions of Rotterdam ; the great cathedral, with its monuments covered with epitaphs in old Dutch verse, and with coats-of-arms mutilated by the French ; the Scotch church on the Schotche Dyk, and the stern of the *Royal Charles*, cut out of the Medway by the Dutch in 1667 ; the Cabinet of Curiosities ; and after partaking of schiedam in the house where Erasmus first saw the light, there remained nothing more to examine or to interest him, after he had visited the Academy of Science, where he saw an object which filled him with an interest that was fated to deepen and increase ere many hours were over his head.

In an ill-lighted room of the Academy he suddenly came upon the portrait of a woman that riveted his attention in a singular degree. It was a full-length of a lady, tall and slender, yet round and shapely, with a face of sad and weird, yet exquisite beauty, with a wondrous wealth of blue-black hair, streaming backward, as if borne by a soft breeze. Her eyes, dark as night, sparkled with an expression full of power in their well-like depths. Her features were bold yet soft, her straight nose blending into the low, classic brow, over which the parted hair formed a sharp downward peak. The eye-brows were dark and strongly defined, and the eyes looked as if no impure thought had ever occurred to their owner. She had but one blemish, a tiny black mole in a dimple on the left side of her firm, full-lipped mouth. Among the inartistic and certainly most unpoetical Dutch, it was an object of less interest and less appreciated than the represen-

tation of a newly-slaughtered pig by Snyders, or any recollection of still-life, carrots, and turnips by De Heem, or a Teniers representing hideous boors drinking and dancing as people can only dance in sabots ; thus it perhaps attracted usually but little attention in the dusky corner to which it is no doubt yet consigned. To the fascinated fancy of Gerard Melville it was not a picture that seemed to be in the room, but almost a living being ; and, what impressed him more, she seemed the embodiment of all his fancy had dreamt of in Salome, the dark-haired heroine of his novel, even to the little mole, like a kissing patch, close to her lovely mouth.

He turned to the number in his catalogue : ‘Titian—died 1576.’ Further information there was none.

‘Nearly three hundred years ago must all this wondrous beauty have passed away and mingled with the dust !’ he thought sadly, as he turned to go, and yet returned again and again to gaze on the picture, till at last he forced himself into the sunny streets, where still its pale beauty and its haunting eyes seemed to follow him, and to come between him and other thoughts—between him and all he looked on, even amid the gaiety of the Tivoli Gardens, where he whiled away the evening in the suburbs—places not unlike the old-fashioned tea-gardens in England, but frequented by the highest class of citizens, and where there are ball and billiard rooms, music, and, of course, smoking *ad libitum*.

That night he dreamt of the picture, and awoke with a start, and thought to contribute it to his surroundings, rather than the work of Titian. His room, a great old-fashioned one, with wainscot panels, was eminently one for a fanciful person to feel uncomfortable in, though the fire in the iron stove burned cheerily ; there were rustling sounds, rats it might be, heard within the walls, and the eyes of the pictures thereon—old burgomaster-looking personages in thick ruffs—seemed to watch him with the ‘eyes of the dead, ghastly, desolate, and dread ;’ and there were uncertain shadows out of which he expected something weird momentarily to start.

‘Am I becoming weak in intellect, silly, or what, to permit a picture—mere perishable oil and canvas—to haunt me thus ?’ thought Gerard ; so he resolved to leave Rotterdam far behind him on the morrow ; but, as the morrow proved

to be Sunday, and he missed the early train for Cologne, he could not get one till three in the afternoon, as Sunday among the Presbyterians in Holland is not unlike the same day as held by those north of the Tweed. Slowly passed the day in a stillness broken only by the monotonous tolling of bells, till the time came when Gerard, now fretful and impatient, found himself in the train, and proceeding with slow and deliberate pace—speed it could not be called—along the *Niederlandische Rhin Spoorweg*. Alone in the carriage, there was no one to disturb the current of his thoughts, and dreamily he gazed out on the flat and most utterly uninteresting country through which he travelled—a district so divided between land and water that it is difficult to say to which it properly belongs, intersected in every direction by canals in which the hideous rows of pollard willows were reflected, and in some places by long lines of other trees, the flat surface of the far-stretching landscape being dotted here and there by a tiny village, a farm, perhaps a summer-house, while elsewhere a steeple or a windmill seemed to break the bleak and dull monotony of the Dutch horizon. On and on sped the train, by Arnheim in Guelderland, called ‘the Dutch paradise,’ though why, no one knows, as it is nearly all water, like everywhere else thereabouts ; by Utrecht, the scene of the famous Treaty, which certainly interested him ; by Emmerich, where, for the first time, he saw a modern fortress, for this is a German one of the first class, and frowns with all its cannon over the junction of the Lippe with the Rhine. By this time evening was deepening into night and utter darkness, without a star to be seen, as the train, about seven o’clock, approached Zevenaar, and in the interest he felt at his near approach to the far-famed Rhine, Gerard had forgotten all about the Titian he had seen at Rotterdam. Zevenaar is an obscure little town in Guelderland, on the right bank of the mighty river, where carriages are changed from the Dutch to the Prussian line of railway, and where, amid much harsh and guttural shouting, tickets are closely inspected, and baggage overhauled, amid prodigious bustle and confusion ; glad to escape from which, after having a *petit verre* of cognac at the buffet, and lighting his cigar, Gerard took his seat in a carriage, a compartment of which he had, as before, to himself.

The night was wild and stormy, with great masses of crape-like clouds drifting across the starless sky. At the black-looking little station there were visible in its lights, and those which came in weird gleams from the engine, the usual porters one sees everywhere, trundling barrows to and fro, but then the night scene was varied by the aspect of the burly and bearded travellers with their enormous meerschaum bowls dangling from their lips, a few Prussian soldiers with spike-helmets and goatskin knapsacks, and also by the conversation going on round about, and conducted in those loud, harsh, and guttural tones that are in sound so repellent to the English ear. At last the train glided slowly out of the station. As it did so there came an unaccountable emotion or tremor into the mind of Gerard, and the woman of the picture came back to his memory, while a wild and clamorous presentiment arose within him, and seemed in some manner to prepare him for what followed. A sense of mystery, against which he struggled in vain, seemed to pervade him. Gladly would he have quitted the carriage if by doing so he could have shaken it off; gladly would he have avoided what he knew by some strange prevision *was to be*. There was a brief pause of the train before it steamed upon the vast and strong pontoon bridge by which it was to cross the Rhine, the rush of which could now be heard in the gloom close by; and taking advantage of that pause, anxious to avoid the strange alarm that was in his heart, an alarm born of some passage in a dream, some previous earthly experience, or he knew not what, Gerard sprang up to step out, when the guard suddenly opened the door.

'Let me out,' cried Gerard in English.

'*Seien sie ganz ruhig führen sie sich nicht!*' (Be quite still—don't move!) shouted the guard in German, as he ushered in a lady and locked the door. Then in another moment they felt the sudden oscillation of the train as it ran thundering, clanking, swaying, and heaving on the bridge of boats, past which the broad, deep waters of the Rhine were rushing with all the fury of a mighty mill-race. But how can we describe the emotions of Gerard as he turned and looked upon his companion by the light of the solitary and blinking oil lamp in the roof of the carriage? The woman of his pre-

vision, and, to all appearance, the woman of the picture, sat before him, with her dark and sparkling eyes, that seemed to speak of some gloomy secret in her heart, fixed gravely upon him ; and then she gazed on the rushing river without, while Gerard, chilled with a sense of mystery, mingled with terror and admiration, surveyed her. She seemed to be about thirty years of age, and the black hair, which was so wavy in the picture, was now coiled in masses round her magnificent head ; her face seemed always statuesque, yet full of latent energy ; her gestures wavy and graceful. Her hands were white, faultless in form, blue veined, with taper fingers, yet not small, for her figure was tall and ample, and they, like her handsome feet and shell-like ears, were in just proportion. Her eyes were dark, somewhat sunken, and profoundly melancholy, and her whole face, in its delicate beauty and pallor of feature, seemed as perfect an embodiment of sorrow as Guido's portrait of Beatrice Cenci. Never in all his life—it was not, as yet, a long one certainly—had Gerard gazed upon a face more unutterably fascinating and lovely, and yet so—so—what was it ?—sad and pure ! Her black dress was quaint and picturesque, but to Gerard, novelist and close observer though he was, indescribable. When again she turned her face, he saw that her black hair came down in the centre of her forehead in a species of peak, like that in the picture ; and, more than that, a tiny black mole, like a kissing-patch, was on the dimple on the left side of her mouth ! This mysterious woman was twin sister to the portrait, and the bodily realisation of the heroine of his romance, and, as their eyes met again, he felt himself compelled to speak.

'Pardon me, gracious madam,' said he in German, and with quiet hesitation, 'but you are very like a lady I have met before—quite a heroine—Salome.'

'That *is* my name,' she replied quietly, but in English.

'*Salome !*'

'And she was your heroine ?'

'Yes,' replied Gerard, in a breathless voice, as his heart filled with the former emotions of fear and perplexity at coincidences so startling. At that moment the flickering lamp in the roof went out, and he was alone in the middle of

the black rushing river with this mysterious woman—this wonderful mystery seated opposite to him !

CHAPTER XXVII.

MORE MYSTERY.

ALONE in the darkness—yet not alone ; with whom or with *what* ? With all her beauty, a clamorous fear, enhanced by the strangeness of his surroundings, filled the heart of Gerard. The surging and swaying of the pontoons, the rush of the stream between them, the unusual noises of the train on such a bridge, and the weird gleams cast on the darkness without from the red furnace of the engine, were all startling. To quit the carriage was impossible. The doors were locked ; the train was in the mid channel, and the Rhine there is of great breadth. Closing his eyes amid the gloom, he strove to think—to listen if her dress rustled, and pressed his head against the cushioned seat of the carriage, and then all the legends he had ever heard of Germany, the land of ghosts and diablerie, crowded into his excited fancy.

‘ This is absurd ! ’ he thought, after a minute or two ; ‘ of what am I afraid ? ’

After a few minutes of keen excitement, the rumbling sounds incident to traversing the pontoon bridge ceased ; the speed of the train slackened, and the grating of the brakes was heard, as they were let down in succession, and when the other side of the Rhine was reached, lights flashed into the darkened carriage from several points, and Gerard could see, as if by fitful gleams, the sad eyes of the pale beauty opposite, fixed apparently on vacancy. The lamp was re-lighted, and after looking at her face from time to time, Gerard felt the necessity for saying something—perhaps resuming the thread of the brief and strange conversation of a few minutes before ; for the train, though going at express speed, now had many miles to travel, many times almost parallel with the Rhine, before three hours would find them at Cologne ; but when they did begin to converse, all that passed only added to his interest, wonder and perplexity, all the more so, as his heart, or something else, had by prevision told him that he was to meet her just as they

had met. The conversation, as naturally might be expected, too, between two strangers, was broken and hesitating at first ; but so many new objects were visible in the light of the moon, which had now come out brilliantly, that it soon became more fluent and free, and somewhat to the surprise, and much to the relief of Gerard, he found that she spoke English purely and musically, but with a peculiar foreign accent, and a chord in every word that thrilled through him.

‘And you said that you had met me, or one like me, I think?’ said she, recurring by a coincidence to what was passing in Gerard’s puzzled mind.

‘It must have been in fancy,’ he stammered ; ‘and yet last night I dreamt of you,’ he added, colouring at an admission so bold.

Her large calm eyes regarded him steadily, as she said, but without the vestige of wonder or a smile : ‘You dreamt of me, you say—of *me*?’

‘Yes, in that quaint old hotel—Scheppershuis, in the Spaanesche Kade.’

‘Ah—I knew it years ago, when it bore a very different rank. I, too, was in that hotel last night.’

‘*You*, madam?’

‘But left Rotterdam by an early train.’

So she had been under the same roof with him ; separated from him perhaps by only a partition wall.

‘How came you to dream of me?’ she asked, after a pause.

‘Not of you exactly,’ replied Gerard, with growing confusion, ‘but of a picture in the Academy at Rotterdam.’

‘I know that picture,’ said she dreamily, as a pained expression came into her eyes, and her lips quivered ; ‘but I never saw it there.’

‘Where then?’

‘In the land where it was painted.’

‘The likeness is wonderful!’

‘To me?’

‘Yes, madam.’

‘Still?’

‘Still! It is a Titian,’ urged Gerard, perplexed by answers so strange ; but for a time she became silent and sunk in

reverie, while the train, gliding through fertile Cleves, left the village of Griethausen behind. Was she an actress amusing herself with him ; a public singer, or an eccentric ? Impossible, it seemed, that she could be either of the former, she had such an infinitesimal amount of luggage ; but, any way, she was totally unlike any woman Gerard had ever met before. Was she married—or a widow ? Neither. She had no marriage hoop or ring of any kind on the faultless fingers of her ungloved hands. He thought of the strange emotion in his own mind that preceded her appearance at Zevenaar, the circumstance that her name was Salome, and of the strange unbidden impulse that brought him to Germany, and oppressed by all this, he conversed with difficulty ; yet he found her a woman highly educated and well read, of a poetical and sensitive nature like his own, much of a dreamer, too, so far as clairvoyance, spiritualism, and other modern ideas of such questions are concerned, and in her sad dark eyes, when fixed on his, there was an intensity of gaze, a magnetic power, that made him already feel almost *en rapport* with her, and he feared that she might read his thoughts.

‘ You are a stranger in Germany, I think ? ’ said he, after a pause.

‘ Nay, I have been in Germany before—indeed, where have I *not* been ! ’ she added, with one of her sad smiles—the saddest he had ever seen.

‘ Then you cannot, like me, feel how strange—how forlorn it is to be alone in a foreign country. ’

‘ I have been forlorn all my life. ’

‘ You are not English—your home— ’

‘ Do not talk of home—I have none ! ’ she said, with quiet bitterness. ‘ Learn, sir, ’ she added, with perfect confidence of manner, ‘ that in all this world, since time began, no one has been more utterly alone than I, since—since— ’

‘ Since when ? ’ asked Gerard, as she cast her eyes upward.

‘ Since the first days of the Wandering Jew. ’

Gerard laughed now.

‘ Ah, you are becoming waggish, ’ said he.

‘ Waggish ! ’ she repeated, but more sorrowfully than with any tone of reproach. ‘ I know not why I feel impelled to talk to you—a stranger—of myself ; but so it is. ’

Gerard thought of his fear, or fancy, that they were *en rapport*.

‘I am one who since girlhood have never known one bright or happy hour, and how long, long ago was that time ?’

‘Why, how can you talk so ?’ said Gerard. ‘You cannot be so very old.’

‘How old do you think ?’ she asked.

‘Five-and-twenty—certainly not more, if it is not ungallant to guess ; dark beauty is so difficult to——’

‘There—that will do—enough of the language of flattery ; you count, of course, by years.’

‘By what do you count ?’

‘Centuries and more, if agony of mind is taken into account.’

‘How can you jest thus ?’

‘I do not jest !’

‘And your home—your country—where are they ?’ asked Gerard, filled with irrepressible curiosity.

‘My home exists no more—my country does, but under another name.’

Gerard thought she must be a Polish exile, as he had heard much of the dark beauty of the Polish women.

‘Ask me what you may, save of them,’ she continued.

‘Why ?’

‘Because I cannot answer you.’

‘You are an Enigma !’

‘So let me remain—I have been one to thousands.’

‘Why adopt—pray pardon me for saying so—this settled melancholy ? You must be a prey to fancies—I hope not griefs, and inclined to cultivate what Byron calls

‘That settled, ceaseless gloom
The fabled Hebrew bore,
That will not look beyond the tomb,
But cannot hope for rest before.’

She shuddered, and eyed Gerard keenly—so keenly that he lowered his eyes, as he could see that, moved by some secret emotion, her white temples throbbed, and her lips, though mobile, became stern and set.

‘Pardon me,’ he urged, ‘if I have unwittingly hurt you.’

‘I have nothing to pardon,’ she replied sweetly ; ‘but marvel not at anything I do or say.’

‘Why?’

‘It is my nature apparently to do things that seem strange, and to say things that seem equally strange, to those who know me not.’

‘But wherefore?’

‘All that is but a portion of my destiny.’

Was her mind affected? thought Gerard, with a thrill of intense pity. Her words and manner would certainly have alarmed him, but for the pleasure, the joy, he felt in the contemplation of her beauty, which was of so rare a character—so singular in its degree.

‘You are very mysterious,’ said he, with a smile.

‘Few lives are without some mystery, and mine has been a long and bitter one.’

‘Long—yours?’

‘I have said so.’

‘And an unhappy one?’

‘In all this world,’ said she, with her softest and most thrilling tone, ‘there is no such thing as perfect happiness. A terrible experience has taught me this.’

‘I have had my own bitternesses in life, but nothing to cloud it as yours seems to be.’

‘Life!’ she exclaimed, with the nearest approach to excitement she had shown; ‘your life is less than a grain of sand on the sea shore—a narrow space between two interminable eternities! But here is Cologne,’ she said suddenly, as about half-past ten the lights of a great city came suddenly in view, with all its earthen fortifications, the vast cathedral like a dark mountain towering over all, and the broad Rhine, with all the lamps of its quays, hotels, and pontoon bridges, reflected on its waters with countless lines of rippling radiance, and the train ran snorting and clanking into a great railway station, the platform of which, with its crowds of muffled travellers arriving and departing, its piles of luggage, hurrying porters and general bustle, was like every one else all over the world.

‘Here then we part,’ thought Gerard, with his mind full of benevolence and kindness for his companion, who, as she read what was passing in his mind, bowed with her nearest approach to a real smile.

The carriage door was thrown open, and she placed a hand in that of Gerard, who assisted her to alight ; but she steadily and gravely declined all other offers of assistance or attendance. Gerard feared to be intrusive, and while turning to secure his portmanteau from the van, she disappeared amid the crowd, and a sigh of regret escaped him as she did so. How was it, he thought, that beauty so marvellous and striking was permitted to wander thus about the world, unguarded and alone ? What could the terrible story of her past be, to make the present so gloomy and the future so hopeless ? Where had she come from, and whither was she going ? Whence the name of Salome, which had a Jewish and Scriptural sound ; and whence that strange coincidence, her likeness to the old picture at Rotterdam ? These speculations were put to flight by a hoarse voice shouting in his ear, ' Hotel Hollande ! ' and the driver of a droski attached to that establishment drew suddenly up before him.

' As well this hotel as any other,' thought Gerard, as he took his seat and was driven off at a furious rate, but for a short distance ; the hotel was soon reached, and a few minutes more found him in the spacious dining-room, from the tall windows of which he had an extensive view of the city, river, and the greatest pontoon bridge. He had the vast apartment to himself, as at that season there were few tourists, and left thus alone, he thought more of the adventures of the past day than of the vague object that had really brought him to Germany, as he took his seat at the long and lonely dining-table, on which the waiters had laid covers for two. He heard nothing of the hum of the city without, for the voice of his mysterious fellow traveller seemed yet to linger in his ear, till the rustle of a dress made him look up. Salome had taken her seat at the table opposite to him !

' Fated to meet again,' said she sweetly, as he started from his seat and bowed to her, ' by a singular coincidence, we have again chosen the same hotel.'

' The same ?'

' Yes—have you forgotten that at Rotterdam, and your dream ?'

' Ah no—for it was of you.'

She took no heed of the implied compliment, as she seated

herself like an empress, with so much indescribable grace, looking so pure and statuesque, with all her glorious hair dressed to perfection, without the appearance of a hair-pin or an odious frisette among its masses.

‘Carve for me, please,’ said she.

‘Are you going further than Cologne?’ asked Gerard, while puzzling himself over the wine *carte*.

‘To-morrow I go to Wiesbaden.’

‘So do I!’ replied Gerard, as his heart leaped at the prospect of seeing more of her. ‘All this is a most unexpected pleasure, because I was more mortified—more grieved, than I can express, to miss you at the station.’

‘I knew ‘hat we should meet again—though not so soon.’

‘You knew it?’

‘Yes.’

‘But how?’

‘I cannot tell you—by some secret power or impulse—by some spirit-born prevision that I find impossible to explain to you; so let the mystery rest where it is,’ she added, bending over her plate of cold chicken in a very matter-of-fact manner, despite the strange nature of her words.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

SALOME.

MOST strange it seemed to Gerard that he should have called the heroine of his novel Salome, and that the lady he had met should not only be so named, but be a living representation of the ideal his mind had pictured, and that he had with his pen striven to portray. This was perhaps the reason why her face had so haunted him, or could it be that they had met before, in spirit-land or in some previous state of existence, for those there are who say that such things may be. According to Wordsworth,

‘Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting;
The soul that rises with us, our life’s star,
Hath had *elsewhere its setting*,
And cometh from afar:
Not in entire forgetfulness
And not in utter darkness,
But trailing clouds of glory, do we come
From God, who is our home:
Heaven lies about us in our infancy.’

Adopting this idea, it may be possible for the artist to paint, the poet to dream, and the novelist to depict, the scenes of some other life anterior to this—scenes or faces that may have been lying dormant in the brain till vaguely called forth by the spirit of memory. Gerard looked for her name in the *Fremdenbuch* of the Hotel. She had written in a clear and beautiful hand, ‘the Fräulein Salome, from——’ but the rest was strangely blurred and illegible ; so he could but use the name he saw when sending her up betimes a charming bouquet before breakfast, with a crystal flask of *eau de cologne*. Whether this were mere chance or design—a part of the mystery involving her movements—he knew not ; but when they met next morning at the *table-d’hôte* for breakfast, they were again alone, and he felt as if he had known Salome all his life ; and if sad and grave in manner, this companionship with one so beautiful and unprotected was not without its peculiar charm. Opposite the windows rolled the great river ; beyond it were the streets and churches of the city, and high over all, the vast mass of the Dom Kirche, with its towers which have remained unfinished since the thirteenth century. Did she care to see the city ? Gerard suggested ; he should be delighted to be her escort. She thanked him—no ; she had seen it all ‘ages ago,’ she added ; a pardonable young-lady-like exaggeration. Then she had no curiosity ?

‘No,’ she replied ; ‘all curiosity has long since been dead in me. But do not let me prevent you from taking a ramble ; our train leaves at 11.45 for Coblenz, and you may see something of the city ere that time.’

‘I prefer, if you will permit me, to stay with you.’

‘As you p’ease,’ said she, with the faintest approach to a smile. So Gerard lingered by her side at a window of the hotel ; and it was pretty evident that, with a companion so dazzling and seductive, the young traveller’s intended volume of notes on Germany would not make much progress.

And while she sat gazing on the city—the ‘Rome of the North,’ with the masses and spires of its many churches steeped in ruddy sunshine, and all the long extent of the river’s bank from the Rheinau to Cæsar’s Wall, he was entirely occupied with her. Of this occupation and admiration she was perfectly conscious, but seemed as perfectly indif-

ferent about it ; but she sat with his bouquet in her lap. Her arched eyebrows were perhaps a little too thick for strict feminine beauty ; seen now by day, the full pouting lips were firm and sweet, yet hard in expression, with a shade just visible on the lovely upper lip ; and when she lifted the full white lids and long black fringes of her soft eyes, the latter seemed to shine and sparkle, and every glance went straight to the heart : and a beautiful picture she seemed, as with her charming hands folded idly before her and her head thrown slightly back, she sat dreamily looking out on the sunlit masses of the old cathedral city. Who or what was this woman ? thought he.

‘That, I believe, is the ancient gate known as the Rheins Hohe,’ said Gerard, breaking a long pause (during which she seemed sunk in reverie) and pointing to an embattled arch not far from the hotel windows.

‘Ah—yes,’ she replied, suddenly brightening up, ‘Marie de Medicis passed through that gate a few days before she died in that old house, No. 10, Sternan Gasse, and I remember that she nearly fell from her horse——’

‘You remember ?’ interrupted Gerard, at a casual remark so strange.

‘Yes,’ she replied quietly.

‘You remember to have heard ?’ suggested Gerard.

‘As you please,’ she replied, but with a pained expression of face, and paused.

‘She *is* making game of me,’ thought Gerard, and yet her strange gravity of demeanour repelled alike the idea and a momentary impulse he felt to ‘chaff’ her in turn.

‘She nearly fell from her horse—and what happened ?’

‘Nothing ; she was faint and ill. She died a few days after. Her remains were sent to France, but her heart was left in Cologne.’

‘Perhaps you saw her funeral,’ said Gerard, in spite of himself.

‘Perhaps I did,’ she replied. ‘Do not think I say these things to tease you,’ she suddenly added, on seeing that he was regarding her with pain, doubt, and anxiety in his face. But every now and then she said strange things that startled him. Taking a flower from a jardinière close by, she was about to place it in her corsage, when he said ;

'Do not place that in your bosom.'

'Why?' she asked, pausing in the act

'It is yellow hyacinth.'

'Well—and what of that?'

'Don't you know it is the emblem of Death?'

'Yes, but it matters not to *me*.'

'Do not say so—I am not without superstition.'

'Those who come of mountain races never are. I shall, to please you, throw it away—thus; but such emblems are nothing to me. I can never die.'

Most singular was the tone of her voice, and unfathomable the expression of her eye, as she made this strange admission.

'Ah,' said Gerard, trying to laugh, yet with a lump in his throat, 'now you are at your wild speeches again.'

At that moment a waiter announced that the vehicle was at the door to take them to the railway station, where they took the train *viâ* Coblentz and other places for Wiesbaden, and where Gerard, by the judicious 'tip' of two Prussian dollars, secured that they should have a compartment to themselves the whole way.

Seated sometimes by her side, sometimes opposite to her, Gerard felt all the gay charm and stirring novelty of the situation, as the train sped swiftly on for miles and miles parallel with the Rhine, after Bonn was left behind, and every turn of the view, every mile or less, brought to sight some castled crag, some quaint old church, or toylike village of picturesque houses on the vine-clad banks; Rolandseck, the scene of Schiller's 'Knight Toggenburg' on the right; then on the left, high Drachenfels, with the cave where the dragon was slain by the horned Siegfried, the hero of the Niebelungen lay, and so on. His 'John Murray' was seldom out of Gerard's hand, and he only relinquished it to gaze into the dark eyes of his passive and indifferent companion, whom no grandeur or beauty in the scenery seemed to interest—not even Coblentz, or the might of Ehrenbreitstein, with four hundred cannon bristling high in the air. Doubtless she had 'done' the Rhine many times, he thought, with a sigh, and found nothing in it; yet, with all this strangeness of manner, as hour by hour went past in her society, he felt himself more and more attracted by her.

'Salome!' said he suddenly, after a long pause, during which his eyes had been bent tenderly upon her.

She started, but said quietly, 'Well?'

'May I call you Salome?' he asked softly.

'Yes; it is my name.'

'Oh, thanks for the privilege!' he exclaimed.

'And you—how are you named?'

He told her, adding, 'Pray call me only Gerard: but Salome what—what more?'

'Nothing,' she replied, fixing her large eyes upon him.

'Have you no surname?'

'No. Like many noble Germans, my family had none.'

'Had? You speak in the past tense, Salome.'

'Because they are dead.'

'All?'

'Yes, all; I am alone in the world,' she replied, with an expression of intense sadness in her face.

'Surely you must have many admirers—it may be lovers?' said he, with a pang.

'Many who have loved me: yes, of course.'

'And in vain?'

'Yes.'

'Why? Because none were worthy of you?'

'No; because they might as well love the moon, or its beams upon the water.'

This was not encouraging; it chilled Gerard, and caused him to relinquish a desire to take one of her hands in his; but whatever her odd speeches meant, he could not fail to discover, and to be impressed by the fact, that her deep knowledge of human nature, and her information concerning every country in Europe, and even Asia, were very remarkable in their quality and degree. He felt himself like a child or a fool by her side. Whence came all her strange, varied, and endless recollections, which seemed almost to tell of an often and reiterated existence of the divine essence which we term soul? Was her life but a case of repeated metempsychosis, equalling that of Hindoo belief? Or was it—oh, horror! he felt his heart die within him at the suspicion in one so lovely and alluring—was it madness?

'You are thinking of me,' said she, bending her eyes keenly upon him as this distracting idea occurred to his mind.

'Salome,' he exclaimed, as he felt himself change colour as if convicted of an unworthy thought, 'you are incomprehensible.'

'There is nothing strange in that.'

'Why, Salome?'

'Because there are times—many, many times—when I cannot comprehend myself.'

From all he could gather, her life seemed to be without aim or object; and in all the many subjects she touched on she never referred in the faintest or most remote manner to friends, relations, or home; hence was the ever-recurring question to Gerard—who or what could she be? And hourly deeper and more tender grew his interest in her, till he seemed to have no thought but for her and with her. What or whence was the occult power this woman possessed over him? It was something beyond her marvellous beauty; but whence did it spring, that he felt as one in a dream when by her side, and that she could mould him to all her wishes, and seemed to know even his secret thoughts in spite of himself. She had, he saw, in her sweet, soft, solemn dark eyes a rather unpleasant habit at times of staring fixedly over his head or shoulder, as if it were at something behind him, something unseen by him, like those who are said to be ghost-seers, or ghost-haunted. Yet withal he found himself fast learning to love her, and thought that affection, in time, might cure the strange and morbid gloom and sorrow that seemed to absorb her.

How strange and unnatural to him now, with these newborn thoughts and hopes in his brain, seemed the superstitious terror, yet mingled with interest, he had of her on that night they crossed the rushing Rhine together, and the carriage lamp went out. When he recalled it he felt ashamed of himself, and feeling half conscious that from some subtle affinity she was able, in his eyes, perhaps, to read his thoughts, he shrank from the fear of her knowing that clamorous alarm which he now deemed so unworthy of her and of himself. Again the lamps were lighted after St. Goarshausen was passed, and amid the darkness they could barely see there the finest glories of the Rhine, hemmed in by wild and precipitous rocks, with the Castle of Rheinfells looking grimly

down, as it were, from amid the stars. Long ere the lights of Wiesbaden, the scene of his mother's bitterest sorrows came in view, she had permitted her ungloved hand to rest in that of Gerard. How it came about he never precisely knew, but his heart was already beating with all the happiness and hope of unspoken love—unspoken as yet.

CHAPTER XXIX.

FATHER AND SON.

A FEW pages back we left the luckless Julian *en route* to Westminster in search of a cavalry recruiting sergeant, whose gay uniform, military port, and magnificent swagger he had more than once remarked; and Julian, though thin and wasted, and well-nigh famished in aspect, felt his heart begin to beat high as he strode along.

'Now,' thought he, 'for a stout heart and a stern will, and to face the world, or the devil himself, in my shirt-sleeves! Fool that I have been not to think of this resource before!'

Common sense told him that the age of sword-in-hand heroism was almost passed away; yet, though poverty and desperation were the primary movers in the new flush of pride, he felt all the wild desire to do, to dare, or to die, if he could but win a name in the place of that of which his father had robbed him—the name embalmed in Scotland's poetry and history; but stern common sense again told him that no marshals' batons were to be found in the knapsacks of those who win glory for that most sordid of paymasters, John Bull, some of whose sons, with Crimean and Indian ribbons on their breasts, were sweeping the crossings in the vicinity of that very rendezvous towards which he was now hastening. Such second thoughts were not encouraging; but like Macbeth's bravo, he felt already,

'So weary with disasters, tugged with fortune,
That I would set my life on any chance,
To mend it, or be rid on't.'

Lost in his own tumultuous thoughts, and proceeding to cross the street mechanically, he was totally unaware of the rapid approach of a dashing mail-phaeton drawn by a pair of spirited horses, and all that passed for the next few seconds

was like a horrible dream or electric shock—he felt a lash from a whip—a crash—a blow on his breast, another as his head came in violent contact with the causeway, and he was under the hoofs of the horses, lying like a gathered heap.

‘Hi, hi, hi—ahoy, you fellow, get out of the way will you, and be d——d to you!’ cried the imperious voice of their driver, mingled with the shriek of a girl, as Julian was dragged up by many ready hands, bleeding and half senseless, and heard voices saying it was a miracle that he had not been trampled to death. Supported on the strong arm of a policeman, Julian looked for a moment in the face of *him* who drove the phaeton, and the faces of those who sat beside him—Kate, and Amy Kerr—and then closed his eyes, he hoped for ever, so sick and sad was he at heart. Their eyes had met—the eyes of the father and his son! Oh, *that look* in the face of each. The face of the Earl was not then a pleasant one. It was, if handsome still, a faded and worn one—worn by years of *blasé* life, amid the feverish excitement of the race-course and betting-ring; the still more fervid fever of Parisian gaming-hells, or those of Homburg, and many a time of old in the Cursaal of Wiesbaden, when the gas glared down on the faded cloth of the roulette or rouge-et-noir tables—a grim, startled, and feverish face, that Julian had first seen on the day of the otter hunt; and the shriek that he had heard had come from the lips of Kate. Deloraine was less alarmed, or shocked, than exasperated, chiefly by a nervous dread as he thought of the police—a charge, perhaps, for too rapid driving; of ‘those cursed newspaper fellows,’ and *who* the injured young man might prove to be, if he died and the affair came to be sifted.

‘You’ll give me your card, sir?’ said a police sergeant, civilly enough, as he saw that he had evidently to do with one of the ‘upper ten,’ and he gave a salute on receiving the piece of pasteboard, adding, ‘I only ask it as a matter of form, because more may come out of this accident.’

This was precisely what Deloraine dreaded, and giving a crown to the sergeant, he said briefly: ‘Send him home in a cab,’ drove rapidly away, leaving Julian, half sinking and half supported, in the centre of a fast gathering crowd.

‘Home, indeed,’ said the sergeant, ‘the poor fellow don’t

look much as if he had one, and this is a case for the hospital—there are bones broken, I fear.’

A cab was quickly at hand, and Julian, half senseless, with blood flowing from his head and mouth, was rapidly driven away, he knew not, and cared not whither. It is doubtful if the Earl and Countess much enjoyed the remainder of their drive. *He* had a dread that Julian, in the extremity of pain or just indignation, might assert who he was, if he knew the fact, of which knowledge the Earl had some doubts ; yet he hated him not the less. *She* had a dread of showing too much interest or concern, lest the Earl might discover—if he did not already know—that Julian had been the lover of her girlhood. Amy Kerr alone was free to lament the too apparent sad fate of one with whom she had spent many a gay and happy hour at home ; and her incessant recurrences to these reminiscences, together with her asserted intention of discovering and befriending Julian, filled the Earl with more rage than he dared display to her as a guest and the friend of his wife. Meanwhile, how fared it with the object of all these conflicting thoughts ? A severe injury of the head, a couple of broken ribs, the loss of that which he could ill afford in a state so debilitated, much blood, were the result of that street accident, which perhaps would not have occurred had Julian been less immersed in his own sad thoughts. Could Gladys, or the old silver-haired Captain, who like her worshipped him, though he was, like Gerard, a child of misfortune and evil augury—those who had watched the little couch in which the twin brothers lay asleep with anxiety and fear if but a finger of either ached, and would have tempered the wind of heaven to both—have seen Julian, as he lay there in the white-washed ward of the great hospital, with its many iron beds in rows against the bare bleak wall, with the names, ages, and numbers of the many sufferers on tin labels hung overhead—could they have seen him as he lay there, we say, it might have broken their hearts. For many hours he lay as one in a dream or doze, scarcely knowing what had happened, and so stunned and sunk in strength that only a dull and aching sense of pain occurred to him. His frame, so wasted by past privation, was scarcely discernible as he lay under the bed-clothes. He seemed the ghost of his

former self, and his once beautifully cut features, now pallid and wasted, where not concealed by the bandages about his head, were like a pinched waxen mask ; and the bones of his delicate hands were like those of a skeleton as they lay on the coarse hospital coverlet, or played fretfully, or unconsciously, with it. The keen sense of pain in the broken ribs—a pain that felt at times like fire scorching him—recalled him then to consciousness ; but whenever it subsided his mind relapsed into torpor, or wandered, less perhaps from the effect of the accident itself, than of the weeks of actual want that had preceded it.

‘Gerard—Gerard,’ he would say with his pale blue lips, ‘where are you—where? Kinless—kinless—my only brother, we are alone in the world.’

There are certain times when in dreary moods we seem to go over all our past life from stage to stage, when the faces and voices of ‘the lost, the distant, and the dead,’ with many a forgotten episode, come back to us by the association of ideas ; but it was not quite thus with Julian, whose mind was wandering then, and there revolved before him a phantasmagoria of his past : now he was by the trouting stream where so often he had fished and sketched with Kate, and the murmur of its waters, as they stole under the long yellow broom, came pleasantly to his ear ; anon he was at the trysting-place, the old white wicket, waiting for a Kate who never came ; then he saw his mother’s grave under the old yew-tree, and then, as if by association of ideas, he was in his grandfather’s sick-room at Fairy Knowe, with the dark shadow of death hanging over it, for the old man was dead, and the grey light of the morning came slowly in on his thin and reverend face, out of which the lines of care had become effaced for a time, while Gerard and he stood hand in hand, looking for the last time upon their only earthly friend ; then the day of the funeral, when, with the fallen leaves of the past year whirling in the blast, he had been gathered to his rest, and the household fires were extinguished for ever ! Then, as the past fled and the present came before him, the thought of what his own fate might be if he were thrust into the world again, a cripple, or it might be a helpless and life-long invalid, for he knew not the extent or nature of his injuries. Better,

far, a thousand times, to die ; and if he did, what then ? There would be none to claim his remains : what a sequel to his sad fate—the dissecting-room perhaps, and then a pauper's grave, where a dozen men are thrust wholesale into one hideous hole. He writhed in horror at the idea, and sighed as he thought of the peaceful green village burial-place at home in Ettrick ; and as if in mockery of his bitter thoughts and sufferings, there seemed to come ever and anon the refrain of a doggrel he had heard a wretched creature singing in the Strand :

‘ Poor fellow ! here endeth thy painful reverses,
After the endurance of every ill ;
Among poultices, patients, and hospital nurses,
With sprigs of anatomy, plaister and pill.’

So hours of pain and weariness, of torpor and dreams, stole on, succeeding each other monotonously ; at times he scarcely knew day from night, or what it was with which the nurse fed him by spoon, as if he were a child again ; and if—in his intervals of intelligence—he longed for death, it seemed but too likely that his grim desire might be gratified ere long.

CHAPTER XXX.

NUMBER THIRTY-ONE.

THE day succeeding the accident to Julian went by, and the second and the third days succeeded, but Kate could discover no sign or intention, on the part of Lord Deloraine, to attempt to discover or befriend the young man whom his mail phaeton had struck down in the street ; and a certain secret apprehension sealed her own lips on the subject ; nor did she discover to which hospital he had been conveyed, till Amy Kerr, who had been closely searching all the daily papers for some paragraph on the subject, came in hot haste to lay one before her, which told her all she required to know. The Earl, who deemed it respectable to attend to Parliamentary duties now, was luckily absent at an early sitting of the House, so Kate—we may still call her so—announced to Amy her intention of making some inquiries concerning Julian.

‘ I shall go with you,’ said Amy, whose soft face coloured with more than pleasure.

'No, no, Amy dear. That may not be, replied her friend.

'Why, Kate?'—'Because I would rather go alone.'

'Alone! Won't you take one of your sisters, perhaps Ermentrude, with you?'

'No, not even Ermentrude,' replied the other, as she rang for the maid.

Amy became silent; she felt piqued, nay more than piqued—she was jealous, in fact! Could it be that Kate still—still, though married, coquettishly wished to exert some influence over a poor crushed and down-trodden fellow like Julian Melville?

When duly gloved and bonneted, the Countess desired the ponderous and most respectable-looking butler, Mr. Funnell, to summon a cab.

'A cab!' he repeated in surprise to himself, adding aloud, 'My lady, the carriage was ordered round about this time.'

'I shall not require the carriage, Mr. Funnell,' she replied impatiently, 'I am going eastward, and Lord Deloraine does not like the horses being taken into the city.'

'Now where can she be a-going to?' meditated the puzzled butler, as he despatched the Buttons of the establishment to bring 'the tidiest-looking four-wheeler' from the nearest stand, and in this vehicle Kate set forth, her face looking pale, but her heart beating fast with excitement. The whole expedition and its object seemed something like a painful dream to her, nor did she quite realise that it was a stern fact till the cab drew up in the quadrangle of the red-brick hospital, with its rows of monotonous-like windows, and she found herself threading the whitewashed corridors that led to the wards where the surgical cases were treated, with a fat and rather motherly-looking nurse as her guide. When, after gliding in a species of horror and terror past the rows of beds in each of which lay a poor suffering creature, with wasted cheeks and hollow glistening eyes, she at last saw Julian from a little distance, for she dared not approach too close—and saw him in the condition we have described, her soul seemed to die within her, and she was about to fly from the place.

'Oh, will he die, do you think?' she asked in a low and trembling voice, as she placed a hand on the arm of the nurse.

'It looks very like it, my lady,' replied the woman, shaking her head and her pendulous chin, having the morbid love of the vulgar to take the gloomiest view of everything.

'Die—so young, so handsome !' thought Kate, whose face, costume, and bearing the nurse was eyeing with something of surprise and reverence ; 'die—death ! It is a catastrophe not to be thought of.'

She trembled and shrunk from the contemplation of it ; death—oh, no, no—not for him, and met under the hoofs of her carriage-horses—Julian, whose kisses had been rained upon her brow, her eyes and lips, and on her red-golden hair, in the joyous past times !

'Is he in pain ?' she timidly asked.

'Of course, my lady,' replied the nurse ; 'he has jabbered a good deal in his sleep, and been that awful restless ! But here comes the doctor who attends the ward,' she added, as a rather spruce-looking young man came jauntily forward, bowed low, and, greatly impressed by the appearance of his visitor, asked if he could be of any service.

'I came to inquire about the—the young gentleman who was injured by a carriage.'

'No. 31—ah—Julian Melville.'

'I hope from my heart, that—that,' began Kate

'It is not a dangerous case, so far as the fractured ribs are concerned,' said the doctor anticipating her.

'Thank Heaven !'

'Oh, no—only—it would seem that *other* causes are at work.'

'Other causes ?'

'Disturbance of the mind. He has—or imagines that he has—suffered some grievous wrong. There is an extreme debility about the patient.'

'Debility—caused by what ?'

'Recent loss of blood, added—to——' and the doctor paused, and even coloured visibly, being dubious in what way this brilliant young lady was related to, or interested in, the helpless creature then before them.

'Added to what ?' asked Kate with her eyes dilated.

'A process of starvation—he must have been for days and days without solid food ere the accident occurred.'

‘Oh, my God!’ she exclaimed, with clasped hands.

‘If we can induce him to take plenty of nourishment, a little time will cure all that, and restore his strength. Then there may be no doubt of his recovery.’

Julian, asleep, was tossing restlessly from side to side, and as he did so, suddenly displayed an arm and shoulder, fleshless and attenuated, almost like those of a skeleton. Kate shuddered and turned away her eyes, in which the tears were welling fast, till the nurse replaced the coverlet. Then, as if some mysterious sense of her presence had occurred to him, he murmured her name.

‘Kate! Kate!’

‘He often mutters thus in his sleep,’ said the doctor. ‘Do you know who he refers to?’

‘No,’ replied Kate, colouring deeply.

‘And also of his mother. Is she alive?’

‘She has long been dead. Does he ever speak of his father?’

‘Yes; but with something of repugnance.’

‘Most strange!’ said Kate.

Julian, hearing voices, opened his eyes. How sunken, and with all their darkness how unnaturally bright they seemed, as he looked around him with a gaze that was blank, for his sight was as yet too dim to recognise Kate where she stood, yet the wild gaze went to her heart like a dagger. She turned away, dreading all recognition then, and feeling oppressed by the place, the scene, and all its circumstances to such an extent that she feared fainting; she withdrew, escorted to the door by the doctor, who did not ask her name, though he was burning with natural curiosity to know who his beautiful visitor was, and promised that all her wishes regarding Julian’s removal to a separate room, and providing him with every comfort her purse could furnish, should be duly attended to. ‘A little time and I shall come again,’ said she, presenting her hand as he closed the cab-door; and she drove away, forgetting that her visit alone might cause speculation, scandal, or peril, for her heart was full of great pity, and for this she had but one confidante, her friend and gossip, Amy Kerr. When seated with the latter, who, pale, tearful, and somewhat envious of her visit, listened

to her narrative within a stately room the magnificent furniture of which displayed many marvels in rosewood and buhl, yellow satin hangings, Sèvres china, pictures, mirrors, and statuettes, with that view of the noble park which all the windows of Park Lane command, the contrast between it and the place she had left came powerfully to her mind. There were stately dinners at home and elsewhere, drives, balls, drums, vapid visits to pay, and the whole routine of fashionable life to be undergone ; but they had all, *pro tem.*, lost their charm to the young Countess ; undergone, we say, for amid them all, to do her justice, she saw a species of spectrum—the half-killed and well-nigh wholly-starved Julian Melville, stretched on his pallet in the cold, bare, whitewashed ward of the hospital, and numbered as thirty-one ! But thanks to her care and injunctions, though he knew it not, when Julian, a day or two after her visit, began to look about him, he found himself, not in the great common ward surrounded by scenes of suffering and even death, but in a pleasant little separate apartment, brightened and made gay by fresh flowers in vases, by little pictures on the walls, and surrounded by comforts that were, to the friendless patients in the abode of suffering, unknown ; but the cause or source of this change was made apparent to him when one day his nurse ushered in a lady. She threw up her veil, and he saw the face of Lady Deloraine—of the fair but faithless Kate ! For a few moments both were full of the most painful agitation, and both could have crushed their hands into their hearts, were it possible, to allay their frightful beating ; yet Kate suffered most, perhaps, for Julian, from causes to her unknown, had been fast steeling himself to the necessary amount of indifference. It was impossible for him to behold her, when he was so weak and so utterly without another friend in the world, unmoved ; but there was no longer in his heart the wild turmoil of the past, or even the momentary fascination he felt when, after a lapse of time, he saw her on that day driving in the Row, and Amy Kerr uttered his name aloud.

‘This is most kind of you, Lady Deloraine,’ said he (making an effort to pronounce the name), after he had answered her nervously-made inquiries as to his progress.

'Call me Kate, Julian,' said she, almost passionately, as she seated herself in the nurse's chair; 'I am Kate to you when none are near who know us. Thank Heaven, you are recovering.'

'But for the sake of Gerard, I would still hope I may be dying now. God knows, Kate,' he continued, in a faint voice, 'how I have struggled for food and to keep my head above water; but the black waves of misfortune have flowed over me at last.'

'And where is Gerard?'

'Alas! I know not.'

'You know not?' she exclaimed.

'Somewhere in Germany—probably Wiesbaden.'

'What took him there—away from you?'

'To write a book, I believe,' replied Julian, half evasively.

'Ah, his novel was a great success. Amy Kerr and I read every page of the three volumes in one day.'

'In one day! I believe it took poor Gerard six months to write.'

'How powerfully he describes the dark and beautiful Salome! One might know her anywhere.'

'She broke her lover's heart, according to the tale,' said Julian, gloomily.

'Oh, hearts are not so easily broken,' said Kate, with a little nervous laugh, 'though perhaps you think mine a weak one.'

'I can forgive that, but not the treachery of your husband,' said Julian, through his clenched teeth.

'Treachery—to you?' asked Kate in surprise.

'Not exactly to me—in the first instance, at least,' said Julian, on whose tongue the great secret was trembling.

'To whom, then?'

'To whom matters not—matters not now,' he replied huskily; then he added, 'Are you happy, Kate?'

'Yes.'

'Thank Heaven!'

He scrutinised her keenly. Her beautiful face was paler than its wont, but that might have been from agitation consequent to the present interview; there was a careworn expression about it, certainly, but that came doubtless of the fast

and fashionable life she now led—one so different from the old times at Kingsmuir.

‘Does he—does Lord Deloraine know that you are here?’

‘No, Julian.’

‘Why so?’

‘Because I dare not tell him!’

‘What does he suspect?’ asked Julian, bitterly.

‘Nothing, Julian.’

‘I would rather have had a hundred rivals than *him* who robbed me of you!’

‘If you broach this subject—adopt this tone—I must go. I did not think, Julian, that now you would waste a thought on me.’

‘Nor do I—in the old sense.’

‘That is well, Julian. Think of me only as the wife of another.’

‘But you know not *whose* wife you are,’ he replied bitterly, and closed his eyes, as if oppressed by thought.

‘May we not be friends, Julian?’ urged Kate, lightly touching his wasted hand, which was white as her own.

‘No!’ he replied, bluntly.

‘Oh—why?’

‘I cannot tell you.’

‘Is it because you hate my husband?’

‘God forbid that I should hate him, though doubly has he wronged me—more than he supposes, so far as you are concerned; and more than you can ever know, so far as I am concerned!’

‘These words are most mysterious.’

‘Then don’t seek to probe the mystery,’ said Julian, so passionately that she drew back in real alarm, and felt in great perplexity as to what he could refer to.

Julian regretted his sudden, and to her his most unmeaning, petulance; but he felt a grim satisfaction in the conviction that if the worst happened to him, and he actually died where he then lay, there was one not far off who would sorrow for him, and see that the last sad offices were duly rendered to him—Kate Kingsmuir! But Julian was one of those fellows who are not easily killed, and when she again visited him, she found him progressing, though slowly, towards

recovery, for the gloom of his mind acted severely upon his general system.

'It is hard for me to think, Kate, that peace and joy are fled from me for ever,' said he.

'At your years, Julian—oh, absurd !'

'They are laid for ever in the past.'

'My poor boy,' said she, playfully, 'don't talk thus ; but make the best of the present.'

'The present ? Look around you !'

'What have you been doing in London these many months past ?'

'Starving !'

'Have you no plans—no line of action for the future ?'

'None, Kate—exactly.'

'Poor Julian ; you leave all to Heaven.'

'And the inspiration of the moment. Most likely I shall become a soldier.'

'A soldier ?' she repeated sorrowfully ; 'how sad is your fate, Julian.'

'Sad indeed—God knows, and poor Gerard too ! Our secret you know not, and never may know' ('nor the sad story of *her* whose place you hold,' he nearly added). 'Our fate was made for us ; you made your own, Kate, and may it be a happy one.'

'Yet, in spite of all superstition I was wedded with the ring you gave me, in play, I think, Julian.'

'In no spirit of play—my mother's marriage ring—oh, my God ! What a singular fatality ! Our paths in life must lie for ever apart, Kate, so for Heaven's sake come near me no more.'

'You are surely angry with me, Julian.'

'No, Kate—all anger has passed from me ; I shall ever pray that you may be happy, Kate, and that Heaven may bless you.'

'And I pray it may bless you, Julian,' said she as she withdrew.

Deloraine knew nothing as yet of her visits, and, sooth to say, she was not anxious to come again, for Julian's manner was strange ; it was *not* precisely a lover's regret.

'The more bitterly—the more severely—he thinks of me,

it makes it all the easier for him to forget me,' thought Kate as she drove homeward, while Julian was annoyed by a visitor of a very different kind—a low limb of the law, a dirty-looking little Jew solicitor, having thick sable locks saturated with pomade, a nose like a jargonelle pear, and a general flashy appearance, so far as much coarse jewellery went to make it.

With a husky voice and a slimy manner, he made various earnest inquiries as to Julian's state of health, his injuries, and the nature of the accident, till cut short by the latter saying sharply : 'To what do all these questions tend, sir ?'

'The action for damages, my tear sir, which no doubt you mean to raise against Lord Deloraine—a man of wealth, my tear sir—a man of wealth, and if you will entrust me with the case——'

'Begone, sir—I have no wish for your officious services.'

'But my tear sir——'

'Begone I tell you, or——'

'I presume you are aware that I expect a fee ?'

'For what ?'

'Coming here from the City, and consulting with you concerning your accident and the action to be raised——'

'You are a cool scoundrel !'

The eye of the Jew sparkled with delight, and he looked hastily round the apartment.

'There are no witnesses,' said Julian, 'so doubly are you a scoundrel, I repeat. Begone at once, or——'

Julian seized the water caraffe on the table by his bedside, on which the Jew solicitor vanished ; while the other, incapable of much action, sank back on his pillow flushed and trembling. Despite the care of the young Countess, the circumstance of her visits to the hospital reached the ears of Lord Deloraine, or he somehow suspected them.

'So you have been to visit that fellow we knocked down in the street the other day ?' said he, abruptly, and Kate coloured deeply at his tone ; 'did he—ah—tell you who he was—or is ?'

'He did not require to do so,' she replied.

'Ah—how ?'

'He was my old playmate—old friend.'

'So you knew all about him ?'

'Of course !'

‘Anything more?’

‘More, Deloraine?’

‘Did he not say, or tell you anything of his family?’

‘Nothing that I did not know already.’

He eyed her furtively and keenly; and it was evident that Julian, if he actually knew who his father was—which Deloraine doubted he did—had said nothing on the subject to Kate. Times there were when the Earl almost forgot the suddenly-discovered existence of the sons of Gladys Melville; and now, when he looked on his girl-wife, so handsome, so highly-bred, the idea pierced his heart—or what passed for such—like a sword, with disgust and dismay, lest Julian, in pain, sorrow, or in spite, might reveal to her the secret of his parentage. So these absurd visits to the hospital, and all messages and inquiries, must be stopped. Kate had views beyond mere charity or humanity with regard to Julian. She knew many girls, young, pretty, and *rich*. Could he but be brought to love one of these! She actually spoke of her project to her husband, whose brow grew dark as a thundercloud at the suggestion.

‘Here, he cannot and shall not come,’ said the Earl in great anger; ‘what the devil is this—this fellow to you?’

It was the first time he had ever adopted such a tone to her, and she shrank back in alarm lest he might have heard of her past relations with the unfortunate Julian.

‘You are too impulsive and inconsiderate, Kate,’ he added, seeing that her lip quivered and her eyes filled.

‘But think of the severity of the accident; and then the dictates of common humanity——’

‘Common fiddlestick! It does not beseem my wife, the Countess of Deloraine, to run after a nameless nobody lying in the common ward of a London hospital!’

‘Nameless—do *you* call him nameless, Deloraine?’

It was now the turn of the latter to change colour.

‘Certainly!’ said he.

‘He is the grandson of papa’s old friend Melville of Fairy Knowe, in Ettrick,’ urged Kate.

‘What is that to me?’ asked Deloraine, in a more subdued tone, however. ‘I shall send him a fifty-pound note as a plaster for his bruises—the stupid fool to be mooning in a

London street at mid-day ! You may enclose it to him, if you choose, with my advice that he should go to America, or anywhere he pleases, but not to remain and starve in this huge Babylon.'

'I would rather die, Deloraine, than put such an affront upon him !'

'In calling upon him you surely did not take the carriage?'

'Of course not.'

'How then ?'

'I went by cab.'

'Lady Deloraine cabbng it at mid-day ! Now what the devil—excuse me, Kate—will the servants think of such a proceeding ?'

'What they please ; I was doing no harm.'

But Deloraine frowned, as some of his past experiences, when more than one 'noble lady' had taken a common cab when it suited her to meet *him*, flashed upon his memory.

'Enough of this,' said he. 'I don't want my little Kate to go in for being either a philanthropist or a strong-minded woman ; the first is a fool, the second is bad form—very. This fellow had a brother, had he not ?' he asked, abruptly.

'Yes ; Gerard, who wrote that clever novel.'

'Where is he ; dead, eh ?' asked Deloraine, hopefully.

'No ; he has gone to Wiesbaden.'

'To Wiesbaden ! What the deuce has taken *him* there ?'

'I do not know.'

A dark expression gathered in the face of the Earl, and he turned to the window, lest Kate's sharp eyes might perceive it.

'Bah !' thought he, 'what matters it ? Every proof was lost in the hands of that Scotch lawyer fellow, so what cause have I to care—or to fear !'

CHAPTER XXXI.

AMY KERR.

UNKNOWN to her husband, Kate continued to send to the hospital the finest hot-house grapes, iced drinks, expensive wines, delicate preparations of jellies, which Julian was loth to accept, yet to decline which would have been churlish ;

while books, papers, periodicals, and flowers *ad libitum* were left for him by both Kate and Amy Kerr. In the mind of Julian there was an exaggerated sense of the time he had lain there, lost in a wilderness of vague and despairing fancies, or gloomy anticipations of the future, when he must go forth, hopeless and penniless, into the terrible world again. That common humanity, which my Lord Deloraine so heartily despised, could not permit Kate to cease her kindness to Julian, or relinquish all knowledge of his recovery and future welfare. She could not, consistently with her wifely duty, visit the hospital again, after what had been said to her on the subject ; but Amy Kerr might do so, though not a matron, under the care of Mrs. Funnell the house-keeper, who saw nothing strange in the circumstance of inquiries being made after the young man who had been injured by the Earl's phaeton ; and joyfully Amy undertook the pleasant task, for, sooth to say, Julian had been her peculiar weakness when far away at home in Ettrick. Amy was an heiress : the heiress of Kershope, with ever so many thousand fertile acres in the Merse, and pastoral lands in Ettrick. If Julian would but fall in love with her, thought Kate. She conceived the idea, and had all the wish for such a sequel, without a pang of regret or envy—why should she have either now ?

‘We are two *bonnes commères*, guid Kimmers, as papa used to say at Kingsmuir,’ said Kate laughing, as she and the other lovely little conspirator sat together at afternoon tea in a tiny Sèvres service, and actually developing their plans together. ‘I wonder what Deloraine would think of this. Poor me !’ added Kate, toying with her spoon. ‘I wonder if I shall ever act the *grande dame* to perfection, and suit his standard—I don’t think so. But now with regard to your mission.’

‘We must be careful in what we do, Kate. Julian will not endure being patronised or protected. He is by nature so proud that he is easily hurt.’

‘I never used to find him so.’

‘Times are changed with you both, and circumstances, too, most fearfully so far as he is concerned.’

The face of Amy was fair, soft, and charming. She had

golden-brown hair, with dark blue eyes ; her lips were sweet and arch in expression ; she had a dimpled chin, a slender rounded throat, and most beautiful hands ; thus her appearance during her brief visits of inquiry was a source of intense interest to the medical staff and young 'sprigs of anatomy.'

'That fellow in the private ward is to be envied,' said one ; 'wish it was my luck to have such a girl—regular tip-topper—running after *me* in this fashion. Shouldn't mind a smash of the skull or a compound fracture to create such interest. But who the dooce is the fellah ?'

'Nobody knows,' said another sawbones, scraping a vesta on the corridor wall ; 'but if single ladies have not a vested right to look after single gentlemen, in the name of Cupid, king of gods and men, who have it ?'

'How do you know that either of them is single?' asked a third.

'Never thought of that, so help me bob !'

In the heart of Amy—now filled by one thought, and totally ignorant that she was a source of interest or speculation to any one—there was a sense of affording protection to one who was helpless, blended with her own early and secret regard for Julian Melville, and she actually pitied and loved him all the more because he had been so piteously cast off by Kate ; nor did she repine at, or shrink from, the idea of catching his heart, as so many in this world are caught, on the rebound. Approaching convalescence, he was now seated in an easy chair, propped with pillows, and looking the spectre of himself ; yet it was marvellous that Amy saw not the likeness his face bore to that of Deloraine, even to the proud and fretful knit of the dark eyebrows over the straight and handsome nose. Young though he was, his forehead was not so smooth as it had been ; care and destitution had ploughed two strong furrows across it ; and when Amy looked at him, seated there so helplessly, she remembered, and bitterly repented, some of the half-mocking words concerning him she had, when inspired by jealousy, uttered to Kate at Kingsmuir, for there had been something more than a schoolgirl rivalry between them on the subject of Julian. But Amy took heart anew now, and all jealousy was dead. Kate

was removed for ever from her path, and she had Julian all to herself!

‘Kate has ceased to visit me,’ he said.

‘But she has sent you those beautiful grapes—the truth is that Lord Deloraine objected to her coming here.’

‘Why, Miss Kerr?’ asked Julian, his pale face blushing.

‘I know not, so I am her substitute in caring for you, and the liberty that London life affords permits me to do so. But you are not disappointed thereby?’ added Amy, throwing up her veil. ‘You do not love her still, you silly boy?’

‘When a true love ends as mine has done, best scoff at and disavow it. I have no wish to see her more, Miss Kerr.’

‘Call me Amy, as you used to do in the pleasant days at Kingsmuir and Kershope.’

‘I thank you for your kind courtesy, Amy,’ replied Julian, with a trembling voice. ‘As for Kate, it was difficult for one weak girl to withstand the energies and influence of father and mother.’

‘Combined with her own ambition.’

‘And my obscurity.’

‘But time has healed your wound,’ said Amy, sweetly bending her blue eyes into his.

‘Right—I can hear her name, and think of her, without the least emotion now.’

The thoughts that were passing in Amy’s mind rendered her timid and confused; thus their conversation was disjointed, with many a pause.

‘I wonder when we shall meet again, Julian,’ said she.

‘When?’

‘In society, I mean.’

‘Never more, Amy,’ said Julian, with a bitter laugh.

‘Don’t say so, Julian—you do not care perhaps?’

‘To live—certainly not!’

The girl sighed, and her white fingers toyed with some flowers she had brought him.

‘Of what use is life to such as I am? But for Gerard’s sake, I should rather die!’

He never thought of her, and in her secret heart she was loving him more and more!

'It is wrong of me to visit you, I know, even when escorted by that old lady,' said she; 'but then you are so ill!'

'And friendless, that you have my double gratitude.'

'We were great friends in the past time, Julian, were we not?' asked the girl, with a sob in her white throat.

'Ah, yes, Amy.'

'Julian,' she exclaimed abruptly, 'you have refused many gifts proffered by the Countess—by Kate?'

'They degrade me.'

'Julian—for the past—the dear past, let me assist you,' said Amy, as her tears fell fast, and she added, nervously, 'I have been working a purse for you—will you take it?'

'Yes—but a purse is a useless thing to me, Amy.'

'But not its contents. Here, Julian, are a hundred sovereigns—take them, and you will repay me when you can—do not refuse me; my allowance is most ample.'

Scarcely knowing what to do or say, the girl was so nervous, so tearful and earnest, he put the purse in his breast, and tears started to his eyes, as he kissed the delicate hand, which trembled as his lips touched it, and for the first time he felt all the subtle witchery of her manner—as for her genuine goodness of heart, he always knew that of old. Thinking she had gained a great point by his acceptance of her loan—she dared not speak of it as a present—Amy became more merry in manner, yet rather nervously so, and resolved to bring her successful visit to a conclusion, but ere she went she could not resist some little coquetry. In the past days, when Kate was present, Amy had but a slender chance of gaining Julian's admiration; now, as we have said, she had him all to herself. And thus she adopted a succession of pretty attitudes, placing at one time the prettiest of little feet in an elegant *bottine* on the fender, and then hid it under her skirt as his eye caught it. Anon, she complained of a slight headache, took off her hat and replaced it, then she undid her necklet and brooch, with the silver crest of the Kerrs, a unicorn's head; this necessitated the opening of her jacket, and much nimble business was done in all the rearrangements, in showing to great perfection two very lovely hands, such as Julian had not looked on for many a month.

He detected all this, and thought with a smile, as she bade him adieu : ' Poor Amy ! I, poor wretch, am not worth all this artillery !'

His distrust of women was thawing under Amy's soft influence, for he, young though he was, in common with many men when ' thrown over ' by one of the sex, was apt to believe them to be all alike ; then Amy was a tie—a link of the past and home, and sweet indeed was such a link to one so lonely and friendless, so utterly without kith or kin in the modern Babylon. He had a craving for sympathy, and she gave it him more than Kate could have done ; moreover, the latter was now associated with the secret thoughts of the great wrong that maddened him. He began to watch for her visits, to count the days that were between them, and the few short minutes that each lasted were like sunshine in his way. He had known Amy Kerr to be a girl that was ever attractive, accomplished, and graceful, with the charm of fascination in all she said and did. Touched to the soul at last by the girl's great kindness, by her sweetly modulated and sympathetic voice, which brought back the dear days of home and childhood, in his present weakness, the tears rolled unbidden over his pale cheeks on one occasion ; he could scarcely have told why.

' Poor Julian ! poor Julian !' said Amy, wiping them away with her soft perfumed handkerchief.

' Give me this to keep in memory of you and of to-day,' said he, as he placed it in his breast ; and again the girl's heart began to beat lightly, and the incident became a perilous crisis for both.

After a pause she said : ' And what do you mean to do when you are well and strong, Julian ? I have a right to ask : we are such old friends, you know,' she added, nervously.

' I shall leave London, certainly.'

' Why ?'

' Because to remain here is hopeless.'

' But you will leave it for where ?'

' Where the wind comes from, or where the winds go to ; I know not, Amy.'

She grew very, very pale as he said this. Her eyes be-

came suffused with tears, and she turned her face away. Julian regarded her closely with growing interest, and his heart began to throb and quicken as he watched her now, but not for the first time. Julian, like his brother Gerard, was romantic by nature ; but much of the romance had been roughly knocked out of him in London. He had begun to study Amy Kerr, and believed that he was far from indifferent to her ; he also believed the girl to be too generous in soul to value the position wealth gave her over him ; she felt a void in her heart, with all her beauty and the many chances afforded to her by the society in whom she moved, and he felt certain, or nearly so, that he might fill that void, but poverty and desperation tied his tongue and fettered even his manner and the very expression of his eyes. He would think of Amy only as a friend, and one who under sunnier auspices might have been something dearer. It was sweet for the lonely fellow to think that some one so brilliant as Amy might love him for himself alone, though their love might be a hopeless one ; and so he strove to set any idea beyond that on one side, as it were ; but there came a day when it seemed too evident that Amy could come with propriety no more, and that a crisis was brought about. When those visits, paid as it seemed in charity and humanity quite as much as friendship, ceased, as he knew they must do now, he felt certain that he should never meet her again ; there was much of agony and bitterness in the conviction ; and when she rose, pale and lingeringly, to leave him, his heart beat quick and his brain burned as they had never done in all the love he had borne Kate, for his love for Kate seemed to have come of propinquity and as a matter of course. His hand trembled as it clasped Amy's, and then—but in what words or terms he never knew—Julian told her that he loved her with all the strength of his soul : hopelessly loved her, he knew, but that he could not part from her for ever, as it too probably seemed, without telling her so, and he implored in return, not her love, it would be too daring to ask that, but her pardon for the avowal.

‘Pardon, Julian,’ said the trembling girl, with downcast eyes ; ‘why ask that of me ?’

‘Because I have no right to ask your love, dear Amy.’

‘Julian!’ she exclaimed, as she became painfully agitated, and would gladly have hid her face in his breast.

‘Amy, could you—do you love me?’ he asked now, in spite of himself.

Violently trembling, her bosom heaving, her lips quivering, her face deadly pale, she remained silent.

‘Speak dearest, dearest Amy!’ urged Julian, borne utterly away, and clasping each of her hands; but Amy still hesitated to reply.

There flashed through her mind, even at this moment of delight and pain, with all her love for the speaker, all the doubts she had heard expressed at Kingsmuir of Julian’s family, and the kind of cloud that overhung his parentage. She knew his position in the world—his utter helplessness and poverty; and the girl, all unselfish though she was by nature, and aware that one day she would be her own mistress and the mistress of Kershope,—she knew all these would be hard facts for her parents to consider, and which, proud as they were, like all old landed aristocracy, they would never contemplate with patience. Nay, they would never pardon them in any way, for she knew that her father was insanely proud of his lineal descent from that John Kerr of the Forest, who was also Lord of Roxburgh in the days of David II. Moreover, she was well aware of how great would have been his indignation had he known of her visits to Julian Melville in such a place, though half under the wing and with the knowledge of her moneyed friend Kate. Oppressed by all these convictions, she remained trembling and silent, pale and sad. Julian seemed intuitively to read her thoughts and to know her doubts, her natural fear, and the caution, perhaps wisely enforced by circumstances and society.

‘Forgive my presumption,’ said he, in a faint voice, as his head sank back upon the pillow that propped him in his chair. ‘I had forgotten myself, Amy; but I see all and remember all now.’

‘Another time, Julian—another time—not now—not now,’ replied Amy, tying her veil tightly to hide her tears. And then she left him in haste, aware that after what had passed she could return no more.

She was full of romance; and most certainly her parents

were not. She felt happy and gratified that Julian loved her, though no success could ever attend their love, and he was far from dissatisfied with himself for having avowed it ; for, desperate though it was, she had neither derided nor repelled him. But when he took another view of the situation, and saw the gulf placed between them, less by position than by fortune, he regretted the mad folly of the avowal ; his pride took fire, and he too resolved that they should never meet again.

‘And now to end all this !’ said Julian, on the following day.

That Amy Kerr loved him still, and, under the influence of soft pity and compassion, loved him more than ever she did in the past time, when he had only eyes for the false Kate, he could not doubt. That she, the heiress of Kershope, would give him her hand, if unfettered and free from the influence of others, he did not doubt either. Wilful, proud, impetuous, and impressionable, she might, if she chose, and if he pressed his suit as a genuine fortune-hunter would do—she might wed him still ; but he—*he*, nameless, or with a blot, the bar sinister, as it was deemed, upon him, would never consent to this, and he would never go back, even to his beloved Ettrick again !

‘Where then?’ thought he ; ‘where matters not. Well, well, “there’s a Providence doth shape our ends, rough-hew them as we may.”’

‘Going to leave us, when barely convalescent,’ exclaimed the house-surgeon, when Julian announced his resolution of leaving the place. ‘Nonsense, my friend, you are not out of the wood yet, though I must say that the visits of the young lady and her friend, who seem so interested in you, have done more for you than all the Pharmacopœia.’

Despite the friendly advice of the doctor, Julian adhered to his somewhat rash resolution, and prepared to go forth into the world again, repelling all aid, even from those who loved him, and felt a mingled emotion of bitterness and joy as he quitted the sick-room wherein he had spent so many weary and sleepless nights, amid a crowd of fancies and phantoms—forth into the world again, as poor as he was before, with only a shilling or two remaining of poor Spangle’s

half-sovereign. The money pressed upon him by Amy Kerr he had sealed up in a little parcel, addressed to her, and it was duly given to Mrs. Funnell the housekeeper, on her first periodical arrival with a basket of grapes and other fruit. He had gone, no one save himself knew whither, out into the darkness of the future. Neither Amy nor Kate had any means by which to trace or discover him, and bitterly the former wept, as she thought of the poor pale, handsome fellow, so crushed and battered by evil fortune, whom she might too probably never see again, and of whom she had not a relic, though he had a souvenir of her—the little laced handkerchief; and how long might he be able to possess or treasure it?

CHAPTER XXXII.

UNDER THE LINDENS.

‘You speak of love, and to me,’ said Salome in her grave sad way, without a smile, or even emotion; ‘yet you have known me but a very short time.’

‘Salome, time enough to learn to love you!’ exclaimed Gerard.

‘A few weeks; barely so much.’

‘I seem to have known you for a lifetime!’

‘A fancy!’

‘A lover’s fancy, Salome.’

‘Yet we are well-nigh, and more than that, must still be, strangers,’ she replied, with her sweet sad tone.

‘A face like yours has ever been my dream, and in face and form, and even in name, you are the heroine of my novel; and we seem to be both wanderers—Bohemians.’

‘I am indeed a wanderer, Gerard,’ replied Salome, as a gloom seemed to settle over her low, but broad and beautiful forehead.

‘Strengthened by your love, I could remove mountains,’ he exclaimed.

‘Now it is you, not I, who talk wildly; faith may do so, we have been told, but not love, and that I seek not. Some women there are in this world who can do without home, husband, or children.’

'You are not one of those, Salome,' said Gerard, bending fondly over her.

She was silent.

'You were made for a happy love, Salome,' he urged, but she was silent still.

From all this it must be apparent that great progress had, in a short time, been made in the mutual acquaintance of Gerard and Salome ; and this took place in the linden grove on the Newberg, which overlooks the pretty and regularly built city of Wiesbaden, and between the stems of the trees, from the rustic sofa on which Gerard and Salome sat, could be seen the winding Rhine, the fertile Rhinegau and Mayence, with its pontoon-bridge, all its spires and the great iron cupola of the Pfarrthurm shining in the sun, and backed by the distant Oldenwald. In the warm air the bees were humming, and white and yellow butterflies flitting from flower to flower, and bud to bud ; in the background were dark copses of oak and elm, and overhead was the clear blue sky, flecked with fleecy clouds. They were in the habit of meeting daily, for neither seemed to have another friend or acquaintance in the ducal city. Gerard had quartered himself at a moderate hotel, and Salome, whose movements seemed all involved in mystery, lodged somewhere—but precisely where or with whom he knew not—at Michelsberg, where the great Jewish synagogue stands near the broad and stately Schwalbacherstrasse. She soon learned to shun the streets, which were thronged with idlers, and Gerard was only too glad to be her escort in the beautiful walks among the environs, to the ruined castle of Sonnenberg, the chapel on the Newberg, by the wooded path in the valley of the Dambach, to the Neun Eichen (or nine oaks), through the beautiful woods of the Platte, where the Rhine can be seen rolling through the plain thirteen hundred feet below, amid thick and leafy groves ; and amid such scenes, with such a companion, the passion of Gerard ripened fast. But Salome, though avoiding, as we say, the thoroughfares and promenades of Wiesbaden, speedily became an object of undisguised interest to the many German officers, the 'British tourists,' and other frequenters of the Cursaal, and loungers in the acacia avenue that leads to the steaming Kochbrunnen. Though many observed, admired, and even

followed her, something in her air, her eyes, and expression of face prevented even the most forward from daring to intrude upon her ; and she, though evidently quite able to take care of herself, seemed not unwilling to avail herself of the escort of Gerard, and to like his companionship and society—he was so fresh in heart, so high in spirit, single in purpose, and every way so good and true. When he ventured to speak of love, she more than once threatened that he should see her no more, and when, on each evening, she bade him farewell, with formality, at the corner of Michelsberg, and turned abruptly away towards where the Jewish church stands, there was always something in her manner that forbade him to question, follow, or watch her, and he had but to content himself with her promise to meet him on the subsequent day. When the eyes of men followed her with admiration that was sometimes too freely expressed, Gerard was filled with mingled jealousy and indignation.

‘Sapprement!’ he heard an officer of Hussars say to another, as they passed together slowly near where he and Salome sat, in their favourite place under the lindens, ‘she *is* lovely, but not even a professor of physiology could determine her age.’

(This was precisely a puzzle to Gerard.)

‘Aye,’ said the other, ‘it will be long before she gives up all hopes of matrimony?’

‘I should think so, with that beautiful face and those eyes ; and, moreover, when does a woman give up all hope of matrimony?’

‘I cannot say, Carl, but I don’t think any woman ever reached that period yet.’

Salome heard this banter, which they did not intend her to do, as they spoke in German, and she smiled more sweetly than sadly. Gerard’s heart was on fire ; but she laid her cool firm hand on his, and led him away. On all these scenes amid which he wandered with Salome, he knew that his mother’s eyes must have rested many times, in the days of her early love for, and faith in, that faithless Lord Hermitage, who had wiled her from her father’s roof ; and also, no doubt, in the days of her pain and sorrow, of her desertion, of her supposed shame and consequent despair. Of the information

he had so vaguely hoped to glean at Wiesbaden, he could gather nothing. The embassy had passed away ; Nassau had been absorbed in the German empire, and its Duke resided at Vienna ; even the hotel in the Schutzenhofstrasse, where 'Lord and Lady Hermitage' had their apartments, was in process of demolition, and its landlord had gone no one knew whither. Gerard thus ceased to hope for any clue, and abandoned himself to the delight of Salome's society. He had written to Julian from time to time, at the London address agreed upon, but no answer ever reached him. Could Julian be ill, or had he suddenly left London ? But Gerard little knew how often his brother had been compelled to change his obscure places of abode, or of the misfortunes that came thick and fast upon him. How he longed for the time when his brother should see the strange foreign woman whose beauty and grace had so bewildered him. 'Salome !' How often he repeated her name when alone, unctuously and with unspeakable tenderness, as if the great passion and great fever of life were embodied in the idea of her. Yet his love seemed to make no progress with her. Times there were when he thought himself secure of her heart, for she knew that he loved her, and yet she did not coyly avoid him as some women would have done, for she was full of candour.

'Does she indeed care for me, or will she ever do so?' he asked of himself, and could but hope that in time she would learn to do so, to forget her melancholy, and to laugh, for though she often smiled, he had never seen her laugh.

'I love you with all my heart, Salome !' he had ventured to say more than once.

'You must *not* talk of love to me,' she replied, 'or you may lose me.'

'Lose you, when I want you to be my wife !'

'You know not what you say.'

Then, as other thoughts occurred to him, he would cease to urge his suit for a time ; and like Julian in his love for Amy, he would think how daring it was to speak of love in circumstances such as his own. Yet it was sweet to feel that he had told her of his passion ; and how sweeter it would be to hear her admit that he was not indifferent to her. Can she be rich ? thought Gerard, for to him her ample charity

to every passing mendicant seemed inexplicable. She was so perfectly self-possessed, so brilliant in her intellect, and so full of varied and out-of-the-way information on every subject, that Gerard felt himself, to use a common phrase, 'very small' indeed when with her, and much her inferior in mental capacity; yet, to his bewilderment, he observed that she never read, nor sang, nor played any instrument; nor could he make out to what set of Christians, if to any, she belonged. She had no attendant, friend, chaperon or maid, yet always appeared with her coal-black tresses coiled afresh every day, a pretty band or lace collar round her white and delicate throat; she was always particular about her cuffs, and the bow at her corsage was always prettily selected, and all so perfect. Now Gerard, ever given to thoughtful and poetic fancies, was one of those persons, who are often to be met with in Scotland and in Germany, who hold to the theory that it is given to a few the power of discerning supernatural things and forms, and he actually believed Salome to be one of these, or else that she might suddenly have become endowed with the power, so singular were the remarks she let fall, casually, when in conversation. One day, when seated under the gigantic oak-tree near *Chaussée Haus*, from where the vast valley of the Rhine can be seen stretched out like a map at one's feet, with the *Bergstrasse* on one hand and the summits of the *Donnersberg* on the other, she suddenly said:

'It was not love of travel that brought you here, Gerard.'

'How know you that?'

'I know many things, and may easily know that.'

Gerard thought of his mother's story; he coloured deeply and remained silent. To him it was often a source of wonder and perplexity, not unmingled with pleasure and the hope that she was closely observing him, to find that she was able to anticipate or actually read his thoughts ere they took the form of words; but greatly was this emotion increased on that day near the *Chaussée Haus*.

'I know not what you seek in Wiesbaden, Salome,' said he, laughingly, and attempting to take her hand; 'but evidently it is not pleasure.'

'Neither do you; it is not pleasure, and it was not, as I have said, love of travel.'

'How can you know that, Salome?'

'Because I know otherwise, and the cause that actually brought you hither.'

'You—you do?'

'Yes, Gerard.'

'It is impossible; my object is known to myself alone.'

'And to me. You came to find some proof of your mother's marriage to one who cruelly deceived her.'

'How, in the name of heaven, are you aware of this?' he asked in breathless astonishment.

'Do not thus lightly appeal to heaven for that which appertains to earth, and earth alone.'

'My mother is in heaven.'

'I hope so.'

'Well, well, Salome, such was my vague, most vague object—well-nigh forgotten since that night we met at Zevenaar; as for the proofs—'

'You will find none here.'

'Where, then?' he asked impetuously.

'In the land you came from.'

'England?'

'No.'

'Scotland, then?'

'Yes—and such proofs do exist.'

'Oh, Salome, how can you know all that? Have you dreamed all this, or gathered my object and my hopes from any words of mine?'

'I may have done both,' said she, with her soft unfathomable expression of eye. 'In time, I shall tell you all—not now.'

Gerard for a time was silent, bewildered, awed, and something of a strange clamorous fear was mingling with his love now and almost stifling it, till he raised his eyes again and looked on her beautiful face.

'Oh, Salome, Salome,' he exclaimed, and would have thrown an arm round her, but she drew back with a gesture that repelled him. 'May I love you?' he added, with his hands clasped.

'Yes,' said she, rising from her seat.

'May I hope?'

‘Hope for nothing—so far as I am concerned.’

‘But, if you permit me to love you, may not I hope that you will yet be mine?’

‘I will explain all this to you in time ; but yours I may never be, Gerard, and if I dismiss you——’

‘I should die!’

‘No—I know better than that ; but attempt not to seek me.’

‘Why?’

‘Because you shall do so in vain.’

Gerard felt a kind of conviction that to say more might imperil his future. Her real or pretended knowledge of his purpose confounded him, and still more was he fated to be puzzled by a few brief subsequent events. As they walked homeward by the wooded path that led towards the city, a fair-haired and handsome young officer of Uhlans passed. He was walking slowly in the opposite direction, with a tasselled Dresden china meerschaum in his mouth. On beholding Salome it fell to the ground, as a half-uttered exclamation of astonishment escaped him, and he grew deadly pale ; but he raised his hand to his cap and passed on in nervous haste, while Salome looked actually startled.

‘Does he know you?’ said Gerard with a jealous pang.

‘Yes—we have met,’ replied Salome quietly.

‘Here in Wiesbaden?’

‘No, in Berlin.’

‘And who is he?’

‘Baron Sonnenberg, a noble of Nassau.’

‘I have heard the title before.’

‘He takes it from the now ruined castle of that name, near Wiesbaden.’

Gerard walked on in silence, oppressed by a tumult of thought, and striving to remember where or when he had heard the name of the Baron before ; and he parted from Salome as usual at Michelsberg, without referring to the subject.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

IN THE CURSAAL AGAIN.

GERARD felt a sense of mingled jealousy and regret that any one should have known, and, he doubted not, should have

loved Salome before him ; and, more than all, had too probably made his love known to her, thus procuring a certain amount of—at least—interest in her eyes ; else, whence her startled manner?—the first emotion he had ever seen her display. He remarked, also, from that moment until he parted with her, that she had a preoccupation of manner, and a certain sad, far-seeing expression in her eyes, which he failed then to comprehend.

‘Like Julian,’ thought he, ‘I am not fated to be happy in my first love !’

The reason why Gerard wrote so seldom to Julian now was because of this very love for Salome ; and why he never mentioned her was that she seemed to him so indescribable, so difficult to depict on paper—especially within the brief compass of a letter—a beautiful enigma. All that had passed between them that day made him most unhappy, for perplexity of any kind is an awkward adjunct to a fit of love, such as that which possessed Gerard, and certainly in the words and manner of Salome, and the whole general tenor of her way, there were much to harass and confuse, and to fill him with alarm and anxiety even for her sanity. To fly from his own thoughts—for when not with her he usually sought solitude—on this evening he turned into the Cursaal, the same Cursaal where his mother had come face to face with the fair little Baroness of Sonnenberg (oh ! now he remembered the name, and knew that he must have seen her son ; and he hoped amid its many and varied gaieties to find something to soothe or lure him from reflection. The whole edifice was ablaze with gaslights, and filled with visitors of both sexes ; the crash of a German military band was heard in one hall, for the dancers ; in another an orchestral performance and concert were in full progress ; without the building, the cascades and *jets d'eau* were being illuminated, with an effect almost magical in the dark, for underneath the tiers of marble basins, gas jets had been introduced, which when lighted burst into a thousand tongues of flame, reflected in, and glittering through, a veil of falling water. Through the ball-room, which was crowded with dancers, through the gambling and conversation rooms—where in the former *trente et quarante* with *roulette* were in full progress, and in the latter

many flirtations were proceeding—he wandered aimlessly, a stranger and unknown to all, till he found himself in the gallery of the great iron verandah, which runs the whole length of the stately Curhaus, and is so gay with statues and gigantic flowering plants in tubs and vases of every shape. The verandah and the gallery were both comparatively empty ; but as Gerard looked down upon the long and brilliantly lighted vista of the former, how great was his astonishment to see Salome seated on a sofa, quite alone, and leisurely fanning herself—for the evening was close—with a black feather fan, the silver spangles of which glittered bright as her own eyes with every motion she made. In haste he was about to descend, when he saw an officer of Uhlans approach and join her—the same officer whose appearance had that day disturbed her, Konrad, Baron of Sonnenberg, the son of the *petite* and fragile Baroness, who had been the too successful rival of poor Gladys in the past time. What sought he with Salome, and why was she so disturbed by his approach ? Gerard shrank back. Was he now to be crossed in his love by the son of her who had wronged his mother and robbed her of a husband ? The undoubted mystery that seemed to envelope Salome, her antecedents and her present movements and character generally, made his love for her, if a delight, also a species of torment now ; she was, in every way, so unlike any other woman he had met or conceived, save in her beauty, and so far as his luckless romance was concerned. Gerard felt himself blush at the idea of acting eavesdropper ; but there was a peculiarity in their greeting that rooted him to the spot. If he moved to withdraw, he must infallibly have caught the eyes of Salome and the young Baron ; if he remained, he would be unseen between two great flowering shrubs in majolica vases. He had offered the most passionate love to Salome without any appearance of success ; he had, he feared, barely succeeded in creating an interest in her heart, and he thought he might now discover, though the fact must excite his distress and dismay, what better progress another had made with her—another, whom he greatly feared she had come by pre-arrangement to meet in that place, of all places in the world so unlikely for her—the gay and dissipated Cursaal. Added to all this,

there was her mysterious knowledge of the purpose that brought him, ostensibly, to Wiesbaden, and the secret of his mother's wrongs. Could Sonnenberg have given her a clue? The idea made his blood boil, till reflection showed the folly of such a supposition, as the Baron knew not of his existence, perhaps, till that day.

'Salome,' said the latter, approaching reverentially, with his cap in his hand, at the touch of which she started as if a wasp had stung her. This did not look like any pre-arrangement; but it was the greatest amount of emotion Gerard had ever seen her display, and hence it keenly excited his interest. That one so self-possessed and unimpressionable as Salome should exhibit any emotion at all was unusual; it excited the surprise of Gerard, and—as before, in the wooded walk of the *Chaussée Haus*—his jealousy. Can we wonder that he lingered to overlook—if not to overhear—what passed, when all his future seemed to depend upon her he loved so well? However, all that passed served to increase, not his jealousy, but his perplexity.

'Salome,' said the Uhlan, softly and rapturously, 'at last we meet again!'

'And for the last time, I hope.'

'Do not say so. In what part of Wiesbaden are you resident?'

'Why ask?'

'Because I have some right to know.'

'No human being has any right to be concerned in my movements. You forget yourself, Baron.'

'Would to heaven I could forget you!' said the young man sadly; 'and this Englishman, or Scotsman, or whatever he is, who dangles about with you daily——'

'Well!'

'He can see, no doubt, how beautiful you are, but he knows not how pitiless you can be.'

'Poor boy—poor boy! He loves me—yes; but he knows not *what* or *who* it is he loves.'

'Has this folly gone on long?' asked the Baron gloomily.

'It is nothing to you.'

'It is much?' he exclaimed impetuously, attempting to take her hand.

'Dare you touch me?' she asked, with her most queenly air.

'Salome,' said he reproachfully, 'have you forgotten the little flower-bordered path that leads to the margin of the Havel, and the lovely sunset we saw there together?'

'I have not,' said she, calmly fanning herself, 'though I care not to remember it.'

'Why, Salome?'

'Because of the folly of which you were guilty there.'

'In telling you that which you knew well before—that I loved you?'

'Yes.'

'You know, Salome, that I only waited for a favourable opportunity to carry you off and marry you.'

'Yes—you left the latter part to follow the former.'

'What do you mean?'

'To carry me off and marry me after. Let us end this perilous nonsense!' she added, looking impatiently around her.

'I had to consult an intriguing mother and an ambitious father, who knew you not—you——'

'Had no human being to consult,' said Salome, in a voice full of great pathos, 'and even had I a thousand, your proposals to me were madness. Go, go—and let us part to meet no more.'

He eyed her almost vindictively, and, after a pause, said : 'Can there be truth in the terrible maxim of Rochefoucauld, that it is quite possible for a virtuous woman to have had only one lover ; but that there never was a woman who had more than one, and then stopped, for their number then becomes like x in algebra.'

'And what is that?'

'An unknown quantity.'

A shade of pity rather than anger crossed the face of Salome.

'So, so—you have as little pity for me as for my poor brother, who shot himself at Berlin for the love of you, saying that your eyes had all the fatal fascination of those of the basilisk.'

'But that we may not deface the temple in which God places the human soul, I would take some means to destroy this fatal beauty of which you speak. To me it is a curse!'

'Then, Salome, you never loved me?' said the young man sadly.

'Did I ever seem to affect that I did so?'

'No—you were ever cruel—cruel! My words are like fire, but they fall on ice that will not melt. Oh, that we had never met, or that I could learn to hate you.'

'Do not say so,' replied Salome, in touching accents; 'I have done too much—too much—in my time, God knows, to deserve the hatred of the good and pure.'

'That is your terrible—your inscrutable—secret?'

'Yes.'

'Oh, Salome, we have made a life-long mistake.'

'You may have done so, like all who are mad enough to love me.'

'The future——'

'I have a future, a long, long and terrible one,' said she in a low piercing voice, while a shudder passed over her delicate form; 'you have none—none, at least, compared with mine! Go—leave me and forget me.'

To Gerard all this sounded very like tragic raving, and it was quite calculated to fill him with alarm and sorrow. He was about to withdraw at any risk, when Salome suddenly looked up, and beckoned him to come to her by a wave of her fan; the action was done calmly and quietly, as if she cared not what he might have overheard, and, as she did so, the young Baron bowed and withdrew.

'Salome,' said Gerard, as she rose and took his arm; 'you here—you at the Cursaal?'

'As you see.'

'Do you wish to dance?'

'Oh, no, no.'

'Why, Salome?'

'I danced once—once too often; but that was long, long ago, and since then I have never danced again,' she replied, with one of her far-seeing and unfathomable expressions of eye.

Gerard thought this referred perhaps to some reminiscence of Berlin, and the suicide of which he had just heard.

'Does not the music invite you?' he asked.

'Not that of the ball-room—but hark to the concert.'

'What is being sung?'

'The chorus of Death,' said Salome, and a brighter smile spread over her face than he had ever seen there before.

'If not for amusement, why did you come here?' asked Gerard, eyeing her with growing anxiety.

'I came to meet you—I had a thorough conviction that you would be here.'

'But you met the young Baron?' said Gerard, as his eyes lighted up with joy at her words.

'That I could not help.'

'And, darling, you came to meet me?' he exclaimed in a voice full of tenderness.

'Yes—but only to tell you that which I know you will be sorry to hear—I must leave Wiesbaden.'

'Why—oh, why?' asked Gerard, growing as pale as herself.

'Because that man has found me out, and will persecute me, for he is not loving, gentle, and good, as you are; and for another reason more cogent still—my life, my fate, does not permit me to stay very long anywhere,' she added, with intense sadness and weariness of tone and expression of eye. 'But let us go; the night is becoming chilly.'

With intense sorrow—actual consternation—Gerard heard her make this announcement; and these emotions were greatly increased by the calm resolution of her manner, and the determination she avowed of keeping him in ignorance of the exact time of her departure and of all her future movements. She promised, however, to meet him as usual on the morrow, but at a more sequestered spot, near the Jewish cemetery. She would not permit him to escort her home, but took a droski in the Theaterplatz, at the back of the Cursaal, gave him her ungloved hand to kiss, and drove away to Michelsberg. That night Gerard lay long sleepless and restless on his pillow. He had, indeed, much to think about and ponder over. If she could tell him—which he could scarcely believe to be possible—*where* the proofs of his mother's marriage lay in Scotland, then had his impulsive journey to Wiesbaden not been in vain; but to love her as he did, and to lose her—to lose all her sweet companionship—was a torture to contemplate. His beautiful enigma was becoming more enigmatical; but a time was coming when he was to have a clue, or a species of clue to it all.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE SECRET CHAMBER.

ON the following day Gerard was filled with double anger against the young Baron of Sonnenberg, as the cause of Salome's sudden resolution to leave Wiesbaden ; and it was fortunate he did not meet the Uhlán, as in his present mood he might too readily have taken up the feud of their mothers. On this day he resolved to put his love affair with Salome to the final test, now and for ever ! He hastened to the place where Salome had appointed to meet him, near the Israelitisher-Friedhof, on the slope of a wooded hill north-eastward of the town, beyond the road that leads to Sonnenberg, feeling as he went that it would be impossible for him to relinquish her society, her sweet companionship, though he could scarcely, under their mutual circumstances, foresee the end of it ; but whithersoever she went, he resolved that he would follow her, rather than relinquish hope, and with it, her.

He was at the trysting-place—a pathway, bordered by pretty and feathery acacia trees—long before the appointed time, and to his delight found Salome already awaiting him there.

She received him with great sweetness of manner ; but looking sadder than even was her wont, she said : ' I feel that I am doing wrong in coming hither to meet you now, though most probably for the last time.'

' Oh, Salome !' exclaimed Gerard, as he took her hand.

' But I have a great regard for you, Gerard : yes, one as strong as it is in my unfortunate nature to have for any one. Yet,' she added, arresting a caressing gesture, ' do not mistake me ; it is not the emotion, with which you seek to inspire me, or with which you are yourself inspired.'

' Are you still in the mood to leave Wiesbaden ?'

' Still—that is irrevocable !'

' I shall follow you to the end of the earth, Salome !'

' I shall pass out of your existence as completely as if you had never known me,' she replied deliberately.

' Do not talk in this strange fashion,' exclaimed Gerard ; then in a low and passionate tone he said, ' Salome, I ask

you, for the second time, will you be my wife, and let me share or soothe the secret sorrow that too evidently oppresses you ?

‘No—no—no ! Do not ask me,’ she replied, shivering as if with cold while she spoke, though the noon sunshine was bright and warm. ‘Poor foolish Gerard, you know not whom you speak to, as I have before told you, or whose love you crave.’

‘I love you dearly, Salome,’ said Gerard, in a voice that trembled with emotion ; ‘and all my life——’

‘Your future life, you mean ?’

‘Yes, of course—depends upon a word or two from you,’

‘And these words ?’

‘Are—I love you !’

‘Would that *my* future depended on a tenure so frail !’ she exclaimed, as the weird, far-seeing expression came into her beautiful dark eyes.

‘Your future, Salome ?’

‘Is known to God alone !’

‘Would that I were certain that mine should be interwoven with it !’

Salome, whose sad eyes had been fixed on the ground, now bent them with grave pity on Gerard.

‘You know not what you talk of,’ said she, pressing her white hands on her temples, as if to stay their throbbing ; ‘but learn this—that the sins and crimes of the past make that future fearful to contemplate !’

‘Crimes—sins !’ repeated Gerard, in a broken voice, and certainly with a somewhat scared expression of face.

‘Oh, heaven !’ she exclaimed, with an emotion that was wonderfully deep and earnest for her, as the general tenor of her way was still and placid, ‘how long is this life to endure ?’

‘I care not in what you have been involved, Salome,’ said Gerard, taking her hands in his caressingly, ‘you, I know are pure and sinless ; and even were it otherwise, I have no ties—the world is a wide place, and we can make our home where we will, and wherever you may choose to forget the past, and all connected with it, as completely as if it had never been, in our new and happy home.’

His eyes filled as he spoke, and he held her hands closely within his own, as if to evince how he would hold and protect her, if he could.

‘A home ! I cannot realise the idea.’

‘Yes, Salome, a home, where your wishes would be law, and our rule the rule of love—your resting-place for life.’

‘And then in the fulness of time to die !’ she exclaimed, with a strange gloomy rapture in her tone, and while a wistful expression he could not analyse stole into her face, which became white as marble. ‘But enough of this, Gerard—for your own sake, I would that I had never met you ; but a power beyond our control cast us in each other’s way. Many—oh, how many—have said to me all that you have done ; many to whom my beauty—for I know that I possess beauty—has proved a curse, a snare, a source of final destruction—death of the body, perhaps of the soul ! So do not talk of love ; for years far beyond what you have any conception of, I have had but one thought : when will heaven in its mercy let me die.’

As she spoke, with her dark eyes fixed apparently on some great vacancy beyond human ken, a Jewish funeral, that of a young person apparently, passed by them on its way to the Friedof of the Israelites. It had evidently come from the Michelsberg quarter, and the chief Rabbi was in attendance. They stood up, and Gerard uncovered his head as the gloomy little procession passed. The Rabbi bowed to Salome, according her a deep reverence. He then looked markedly, and with some interest, at Gerard.

‘Do you know him, Salome ?’ asked the latter, after a pause.

‘He evidently knows *me*,’ was her curious answer, as the procession disappeared within the walls of the cemetery. At that moment Gerard saw in the face of his companion a hopelessness of grief that pained him more than the wildest despair could have done. What could all this mystery mean ? Anon she smiled bitterly, and said, ‘Death ! oh, there is nothing terrible in it. In my time I have seen many, oh, so many, make super-human efforts to save their lives from fire and shipwreck, or other perils, and yet perish, in this world at least. Others I have known seek death and fail to find it. How often have I longed for it, yet death never comes to me !’

'Salome,' exclaimed Gerard, with increasing pain and perplexity, for he had never before seen her so excited, 'can your life have been so terrible, so sad, your story so unexampled? All this sounds and seems incredible to me,' he added, with clasped hands, as he drew back in fear, and eyed her anxiously.

'Oh, folly of the heart!' she said, in a low tone, as if communing with herself; 'how often, how often, oh, my God! how many, many times, have I thought of—yea, and dreamed of a grave covered with soft green turf, and spotted, it might be, with wild flowers—a grave never to be disturbed.'

'For whom? for whom?' he exclaimed.

'Myself!'

'Is this madness or blasphemy?' thought Gerard, as his blood began to chill.

'I am *not* mad, Gerard,' said she, sadly and quietly.

'I did not speak, Salome.'

'But you *thought*!'

'Heaven, Salome! can you read one's thoughts?

'In the faces of some, I can.'

'It is sinful to wish one's self dead,' said he, taking her hand; 'let us leave this place; the gloom of those cypresses and the episode of the funeral have disturbed you. Allow me to lead you elsewhere.'

'As you please,' said she, and they began to descend the hill towards where the white streets of the city lay steeped in golden haze and sunshine; but Gerard, though he had come resolved, as we have said, to put her love to the final test—in the words of Montrose's beautiful song, to gain or lose it all—spoke no more of it then. The dread that her brain was unsettled filled him with great pity—yea, made his blood run cold, and repressed his yearning passion and desire to soothe her chronic and remarkable grief. He was very sad, very silent, and almost feared to think, lest his thoughts might be known to her. But a time was coming when all these strange, wild, and apparently incoherent speeches of Salome were to dwell more painfully in the memory of the startled Gerard, and a subsequent episode, ere the day was done, added greatly to his wonder and perplexity. In proceeding through the streets, while escorting

her as usual towards the Michelsberg quarter, but silently, and in abstraction, when passing the now abandoned ducal palace in the market-place (a somewhat stately edifice, having on its front a long balcony, supported by a colonnade of pillars, and two long three-storied wings, adjoining its central mass), a guard of Uhlans, dismounted, but carrying their heavy lances, appeared at the entrance porch ; and, as the public are never admitted after one P.M., it was with some surprise that Gerard observed a considerable crowd and much bustle about the place, and many persons thronging in and out, with wonder and excitement expressed in their faces, and in their hoarse German utterances. That morning a strange discovery had been made, a few hours before. During certain repairs or alterations in the new palace, which had been built, or engrafted on an older edifice, for Duke William of Nassau, about 1840, after a plan drawn by the famous Moller, of Darmstadt, the workmen had to break up a door, which led they knew not whither ; a door which had been concealed by a coating of plaster, and as it gave way beneath their hammers and axes, crashing down amid a cloud of dust, a singular sight presented itself.

Beyond lay a saloon, or large apartment, a portion of the older edifice, but the existence of which was unknown, and the then walled-up windows of which had once opened to the Market Strasse, which adjoins Michelsberg ; and on lights being procured by the workmen, they entered with loud exclamations of astonishment, and ere long the Burgo-master and other officials came. The chamber was pronounced to be one that had evidently been unentered since the days of the terrible fire which ravaged Wiesbaden in the middle of the sixteenth century, destroying the whole town, with the exception of the castle and a few houses. Those who entered now, came upon no grisly or noisome sight, though evidently expecting it ; no skeleton, in armour or otherwise, lay there, but the room seemed the very abode of long departed splendour. On the long table, half buried under dust, lay the vessels and remains of what had once been a feast ; at its head stood a stately chair of state, on which could still be traced, as on the ceiling and elsewhere, the ducal arms of Nassau, a shield sprinkled with crosses

argent, with the lion gules, and other quarterings, over which hung the blackened rags of a velvet canopy. The carpet and tapestries had been long since devoured into holes by armies of rats ; dust and mould obscured the paintings that hung on the walls, and the crystal chandeliers, the slings of which had long since given way, had fallen crashing on the table and on the chairs, strewing showers of crystal over all the place ; while in one corner stood a harp, the strings of which could have emitted no sound for several generations. How the place had been forgotten, or why it had been walled up, of what crime or tragedy it had been the scene, were conjectured by all in vain ! Baron Sonnenberg, who commanded the Uhlan guard, on seeing Salome and her companion, without exhibiting either jealousy or emotion—the young man was too well bred to have done so—politely invited them to see this mysterious chamber, which was now the wonder of all Wiesbaden, and they entered accordingly, with many other visitors, full of curiosity. Gerard felt the latter keenly ; but Salome was calm, languid, and seemed totally indifferent for a time, surveying the place with a quiet, vague smile.

‘You seem surprised by the discovery of this chamber,’ said she, in response to some exclamation of Gerard’s.

‘Not more than others,’ he replied ; ‘but it must have some strange, perhaps terrible story.’

‘Every old house, Gerard—every rock, even—could it speak, might tell the world some romance or history evolved out of the lives of those who dwelt there of old ; so could every old tree, for the matter of that ; for even an old tree is a record of the days, the years, and people who have passed away since it was a sapling.’

‘And you feel no surprise or interest in this, Salome ?’

‘Surprise—no ; interest—perhaps. I have been here before, Gerard,’ said she in a low voice.

‘In this palace ?’

‘Yes, in this room.’

‘This room, which has only just been discovered, and which the people assert cannot have been known of, or entered, since the great fire that occurred generations ago ! Oh, Salome, you rave, or seek only to perplex and distress me.’

'I do not rave, Gerard ; neither do I seek to perplex you,' she said gently. 'See to the proof,' she added, as if to him alone, and oblivious of those about them.

She approached a lofty piece of carved panelling, apparently built into the wall ; and selecting a knob like a lion's head, with very little effort, she pushed it on one side, disclosing a little iron handle. She pressed the latter, and then two panels unclosed slowly, as if on hinges long unused, displaying the damp and mildewed portrait of a beautiful woman, of Salome herself—Salome to the life, even to the tiny flesh-mark on her upper lip !

'If not here before, Gerard,' said she, 'how should I have known of this secret picture ? An artist painted it of me for the Duke of Nassau ; but I knew not that another hand had since painted beside the figure that horrible head !' she added, while an expression of profound distress and dismay overspread her pallid face, as she saw that in her hand on the panel there had been depicted a black and grisly human head, the dark curly locks of which her white fingers seemed to grasp.

'Saprement !' exclaimed young Sonnenberg, as the bowl of his meerschaum again dropped from his moustachioed lip ; 'the picture is you, line for line—what can all this mean ?'

Now something of genuine horror spread over the fair young face of Gerard, and Salome seemed to detect it with real pain. Was this woman, whom he loved so fondly, mad or something more than human ? He reeled, almost senseless, against the wall, and would have fallen, had not Sonnenberg caught his arm. When he recovered, and looked about him, the panels had been restored, the fatal picture was hidden, and Salome was gone ; she had left the place. When Gerard issued into the street, just as the noisy public were being finally expelled by the Uhlans, the long line of gas-lamps was beginning to glitter in the Lang-gasse, as he made his way to his hotel, reeling like a drunken man, scarcely knowing what to think, sick at heart, and marvelling whether he was the victim of some German diablerie, or whether his senses were leaving him. She was gone, with no promise to meet him on the morrow, and, sooth to say, at that precise time he scarcely wished to do so. Gone ! When was he, if ever, to see that perilously beautiful face again ?

CHAPTER XXXV.

A FAREWELL LETTER

GERARD passed a feverish and sleepless night, his heart filled by a kind of clamorous anxiety and apprehension, difficult alike to describe or explain. He vainly strove to court sleep, yet there came not even a passing voice to disturb him. The hotel in which he resided was in the quietest part of the suburbs, and the night was very silent—deathly so, save those strange and sometimes unearthly or inexplicable sounds that are heard amid the darkness when all others are still. Again and again he asked of himself was that mysterious woman, who, concerning herself and her actions, had always said too much or too little, doomed to be the ruling influence, the guiding star for good or evil, of all his future life? In questioning himself thus, the dreamer forgot how few his own years were as yet, or what his future life might be. He could but stare into the darkness, and ponder on the sweet simplicity, the charming candour, the clear, honest and beautiful eyes that were wont to look back without fear or blench into his, while her tongue softly gave utterance, almost casually, to admissions and references that made his heart chill with alarm. But where was she now, and with whom? With morning the *brief-trager* of the hotel brought him a letter in a female hand, and his heart leaped as he opened it, as he knew it must be from her, and was the first she had ever written him. Its contents were brief, and as bewildering as herself, and calculated to excite alarm, surprise and even jealous anger. There were no expressions of regret for abruptly leaving him alone, nor of pity for the hopeless love she had excited; not one of love in return, or any attempt to elucidate the mystery that seemed to surround her. It was cold—so much so that his thoughts reverted angrily to young Sonnenberg—and in some places apparently incoherent.

‘When you read these lines, Gerard, I shall be miles away from you and Wiesbaden. After your rash declarations of love, and my unwitting revelation of yesterday, is it fitting that we should meet again? Oh, no—and I am sure that by

this time even you will, on reflection, agree with me. Remember what I said to you once before : seek not to follow or attempt to discover me, for you shall do so in vain.

‘I have again begun those aimless wanderings, the end of which I cannot foresee. Would to God that I could !

“Day and night my toils redouble !
Never nearer to the goal ;
Never—never does the trouble,
Of the wanderer leave my soul.”

‘Be joyful, Gerard, that I have at last left you, never, never to meet you again. Poor youth, who thought to cast his lot in life with *me* ! No human being is capable of understanding the mystery of my fate, the secret of my life—a friendless, restless, and homeless one—a being from whom all learn to shrink in time, whom even Death himself eludes ; for a thousand times in vain have I flung myself in the path of peril, only to find that flames spared, waves repelled me, and that steel became blunted on my bosom.’

‘Oh, what raving is all this ?’ thought poor Gerard, and again an emotion of aching or sickness of the heart came over him.

‘Gerard,’ the letter continued, in a clear and steady hand, ‘Heaven has set a seal—yea, imposed a curse upon me : but enough of all this. The Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things *visible* and *invisible*, alone can help me when the time comes ; till when I can—as I have already told you—but envy the dead.

‘That I have secret powers and perceptions beyond most people, my knowledge of the object that vaguely brought you to Wiesbaden—an object half forgotten by you in the fatal charm of my society—may serve to convince you ; if other occasions, on which I could read your inmost thoughts, have failed to do so.’

Then her letter proceeded to tell him that in his native land—the land from which he had so recently come—the proofs he wished to possess of his mother’s marriage could alone be found ; and she described, with a minuteness and distinctness that made Gerard actually tremble with astonishment, the house of Uriah Grippie, the mean and sordid country lawyer, in the obscure south-country town of Dum-

fries, beside the Nith—a quaint old dwelling, above the door of which was carved in stone the legend—one of those so common on the doors of old Scottish houses—‘*Deus Benedicite*, 1600.’ In a panelled room thereof, the window of which overlooked the river, there was a secret recess, to which access was given by pressing a knob carved in the form of a lion’s head, exactly like that she had handled yesterday in the ducal palace ; and therein he would find all he wanted.

‘Remember what I have written—commit to memory, or keep, my letter,’ she added.

‘Keep your letter—keep your letter!’ exclaimed Gerard in a strange voice, as he kissed it ; and yet could not add ‘my darling,’ in the alarm and sorrow the whole tenor of the missive excited.

‘How I came to know all this—a most trivial matter to me—I cannot explain to you, Gerard, for I lack the power to do so,’ she continued ; ‘yet I am neither a real sorceress nor a mock one, but a most unhappy creature, who seeks not the occult powers that are given her. Suffice that I knew it all on that night we crossed the Rhine together.’

Then she blessed him, and bade him adieu, and so closed her letter, in all of which there was a vast amount of food for bewildering thought. His heroine bore her name ; her idea had ever haunted him. Then there was his impulse to seek Wiesbaden, the result of which was to throw him in her way ; her knowledge of his secret object ; her minute description of the distant place in which lay the proofs of the marriage of his ill-fated mother.

‘Heaven!’ thought he, ‘if all this should be true,’ while his heart leaped at the idea, and sped home to his brother Julian, of whose fate he was, as yet, blissfully ignorant—Julian, who might yet be the Lord Hermitage !

From whatever source her knowledge came—mesmerism, spirit-rapping, or some of those keen perceptions experienced by those whose highly wrought nervous organisations enabled them to see the odic light, as he had read in the magnetic and electric works of Ashburner and Carl Von Reichenbach, out-Heroding the half-frenzied speculations of over-strained science—he resolved to act upon the information her letter

accorded to him. If true, the sequel could but add to his wonder. If false, he was no worse than before ; and that it should be so, seemed to be more in the order of Nature.

‘Homeless and a constant wanderer,’ thought Gerard, ‘how does she find food and raiment? Surely we shall meet again some time—the world is, proverbially, a small place, after all. I feel sure that we shall—but to what end—to what end?’

Gerard the dreamer had now met with something beyond the most poetical of his dreams, the wildest imaginings of a mind first fostered and developed in that realm of song and wild legend, the Rhinns of Galloway. Ever and anon came the harrowing suggestion, Was her mind, perhaps occasionally, if not permanently, warped in some manner? Else, whence all these incoherences and strange assertions? Was it in consequence of her, or of some crime in which she had been concerned in years past, that the newly-discovered chamber—with the story of which all Wiesbaden was ringing, and the columns of the *Wiesbadener Tagblatt* and the *Rhein Kurier* were filled—had been walled up and forgotten? Then he thrust aside the question as too outrageous to be entertained for a moment, and as adopting for truth the assertion she had made amid the old crumbling splendour of the palace. Yet whence her knowledge of the concealed portrait, the portrait of herself? And also, whence her occult knowledge of the secret in that old house beside the Nith? Mechanically he refolded her singular letter and put it carefully apart in his pocket-book, only to draw it out again for re-perusal ; and then he sat long with his arms resting on the table, his head resting on his hands, and an untasted breakfast before him, not knowing what to think, but feeling somewhat stunned, as well he might. So passed the day—the first of their separation. Of one thing he felt distinctly conscious : that to all his most tender and earnest avowals of love and affection she had never made the slightest response, but had either repelled them, or heard them only with her sad pitying smile ; and this fact he remembered with something of anger when he heard, incidentally, that the gay young Uhlan, Konrad, the Baron of Sonnenberg, had suddenly disappeared from Wiesbaden on the morning of Salome’s departure. This

might be a coincidence, but Gerard was in a mood of mind to make the worst of everything. Suddenly he bethought him of her friend, or acquaintance, the Jewish Rabbi, the only person whom she seemed to know in Wiesbaden. He might be able to throw some light upon her character, even her movements, and be able to say whither she had turned her wandering footsteps. Ever a creature of sudden impulse, Gerard snatched his hat the moment the idea occurred to him, and in a few minutes after was traversing with long strides the Schwalbacher Strasse towards the Michelsberg quarter, where, from some words she let fall, he was aware that she had resided with the Rabbi.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

WHO SALOME WAS SUPPOSED TO BE.

HE soon found the house of the latter—the Herr Doctor Benjamin Ascher—adjoining the great synagogue on the north side of the street, and he observed the Tables of Law engraved on a brass plate on the door-post, as he was ushered into a pretty room, the windows of which opened to a beautiful garden. The day was evidently some Jewish festival, as the walls of the room were garlanded with freshly-gathered flowers, a custom of the Hebrews at all feasts, especially that of the Tabernacle, according to the Jewish author of ‘Alroy;’ and on a marble console, before an allegorical picture, stood a seven-branched candlestick, ‘according to the pattern which was shown to Moses in the mount;’ but the waxen tapers were unlighted. Here then had she been, under this same roof with the Rabbi, and Gerard’s haggard eyes wandered over every feature and detail of the apartment with all a lover’s interest, for doubtless she had been in it many a time. Had she really gone—left Wiesbaden, as her letter asserted; might she not be still in the house of the Rabbi? Gerard’s heart leaped at the idea; but the hope was soon fated to be dispelled. Doctor Benjamin Ascher came, an old Jew of venerable, pleasing, and impressive aspect, without features so strongly, and often disagreeably, marked as the majority of his outcast race. Gerard awoke from his trance of hope as the old man entered, clad in a kind of gaberdine of black cloth, and wearing

a skull-cap of black velvet, with which the snowy hue of his long floating beard contrasted strongly. He had evidently been disturbed at prayer, as he yet bore in his hand the sacred shawl with which the Hebrews envelop their heads during the time of orison. The Rabbi, who evidently recognised Gerard, requested him to be seated, and asked in what way he could serve him, and as he spoke there was a hawk-like glitter in his keen black observant eyes.

‘I have the honour of speaking to the Reverend (*ehrwürdig*) Doctor Ascher?’ said Gerard.

‘I am Doctor Ascher, at your service,’ replied the Rabbi, bowing; ‘and you, mein Herr?’

‘Gerard Melville, a stranger, whom you know not.’

‘You mistake in some degree; I saw you but a short time since with—with Salome,’ replied Dr. Ascher, placing a gold eyeglass on his thin nose, and scrutinising his fair-haired visitor closely.

‘It is of her I have come to speak,’ said the latter, starting up.

‘Ah—I thought so—but be seated again, pray,’ said Doctor Ascher, and a faint colour suffused the cheek of Gerard, as he added, ‘I took in the whole situation when I saw you with her in the acacia walk, near our Friedhof, and in my soul I felt sorry for you. She has left Wiesbaden.’

‘So has the Baron Sonnenberg,’ said Gerard gravely.

‘Of that I am aware, unfortunately.’

‘Indeed! Are they together?’

‘No, he followed her; what happened exactly I know not, but he committed suicide this morning.’

‘Suicide!’ exclaimed Gerard.

‘Yes—he has just been found in the Hof-Giesberg, lying dead, with a pistol in his hand—the same pistol by which his brother perished. Salome is not one to be loved lightly,’ added the Rabbi, shaking his head, and as he did so the silver hairs of his beard glittered in the sunshine; ‘did you, too, love her, young man?’

‘Too well for my own peace, reverend sir.’

‘Then try to forget her!’ said the Rabbi with energy. ‘I, who know her, would beg to impress this upon you.’

‘Her story—you know it, then?’

'Yes—so far as a man may know it,' replied Doctor Ascher, as his eyes drooped.

'It is, you would hint, a strange one?'

'So strange, mein Herr, that I know not how to talk of it. She is well known to our people in many parts of the world ; but her history, or alleged history, seems so utterly incredible that I am loth to think, and more so to speak, of it.'

'Why?' asked Gerard, whose wonder increased with his sorrow at these words, while vividly in memory came before him her sad yet beautiful face, her dark but liquid eyes, that seemed to speak of some strange hidden story, and her sweet lips, that became, at times, sternly compressed as if with mental pain ; 'why, Herr Doctor?'

'Because it seems to the few who know, or suppose they know it, among our people a matter that is better committed to oblivion.'

'Is she a Christian?'

The Rabbi shook his head.

'A Jewess, then?'

'No—heaven alone knows what she is. Rejected by Christians, shunned by Jews—yea, a terror to those who suspect her terrible story, she is yet, with all her weird beauty and gentle sadness, an object of pity—an outcast—a wanderer in the world—and yet not of the world.'

Every word seemed to excite and interest Gerard more deeply, yet, after a pause, he could only ask the matter-of-fact question, 'How does she live?'

'I know not. The ravens fed Elijah.'

'Such things do not happen now, Herr Doctor.'

'God feeds the sparrows and tempers the wind to the shorn lamb ; so may she be fed and nurtured.'

'You speak in enigmas,' said Gerard ; 'the ravens did not bear in their beaks current coins of the realm ; and she seemed never without at least a kreutzer for a passing beggar, and thalers and Fredericks d'or to pay her way, in town or country, like any other person.'

The Rabbi folded his thin hands and shrugged his shoulders in silence.

'Whence her strange name of Salome?' asked Gerard.

'I never heard of it before—save in a romance,' he added.

‘It is a name as old as our race,’ resumed the Rabbi, ‘and as you wish to learn the history of it, I shall endeavour to tell you. Did you never read of Salome, the daughter of Herodias—Salome who danced before Herod Antipas at that infamous and debauched banquet he gave in the Castle of Macherus, wherein John the Baptist was languishing as a prisoner?’

‘When at school I did—and then I must have heard the name,’ replied Gerard, lost in thought for a minute.

‘Well, Salome was lovely beyond all human loveliness, and her grace in dancing to the sound of the harp and timbrel so charmed Herod the Idumean that he promised her, with the sacred bond of an oath, to grant her whatever she asked, were it the half of his dominions. On this she consulted her mother, the wicked Herodias, who, inspired by every evil passion, but chiefly by revenge on one who had never ceased to upbraid her for her sins and impieties, the Baptist, besought Salome to demand his head, and that it should be forthwith brought on a charger. A request so strange startled even the tyrant who heard it, for, bad though he was, he had conceived a good opinion of the Baptist as a just and holy man, whose discourses he had heard with pleasure, though his heart had been troubled when admonished by him of his faults; but bound by his terrible oath, he was compelled to accede to the importunities of Salome; so the head of the holy man was struck off, and presented to her on a golden charger, wrapped, as the Christians aver, in that same piece of snow-white cloth which is now preserved in the reliquary of Aix-la-Chapelle.

‘On this being done, the damsel did not shrink from taking the ghastly gift into her hands by its black curly locks, and, presenting it to her exulting mother, drew a silver bodkin from her hair, and proceeded inhumanly, and in mockery, to prick the sacred tongue which had upbraided Herodias with her many iniquities (even as Fulvia had done the tongue of Cicero), saying laughingly the while,

“This tongue is dead now, and shall never speak more.”

‘But even as Salome spoke, the tongue also spoke, and the eyes rolled, and, to the horror and dismay of all who stood by, it predicted that she should never know the happiness of death; but should live—live on, as a punishment for her im-

piety and impenitence—live on in constant terror of the awful wrath to come !’

‘But what has all this story to do with her I came to speak of?’ asked Gerard.

‘Do you not follow me?’ exclaimed the Rabbi.

‘No, Herr Doctor.’

‘*She* is alleged to be that Salome of the legend—the daughter of Herodias—and that she did not die of remorse, as the story tells us.’

Gerard heard the voice and saw the sharp impressive face of the Rabbi, and thought that he must be in a dream—a dream from which he should inevitably awaken, to find himself in bed in his hotel, or perhaps in the old dull lodging in that gloomy street between the Thames and Strand.

‘Herr Doctor,’ said he, after a pause, ‘pardon me, but are you mocking me?’

‘It is not my wont to mock any one,’ replied the Rabbi, calmly, and without displeasure.

‘Oh, pardon me—but all this sounds so utterly incredible—so beyond the rules of Nature !’

‘I tell the tale but as it was told to me—not by her ; but as it is known among our people ; for such a being as this Salome they suppose to exist, and like that other well-known wanderer of the Hebrew race, who, legends say, is going ever afoot throughout the world, never dying, even from the hour of the Crucifixion to the present day, in constant dread of the coming judgment. Those there are who say that, like him, Salome has a grievous illness every hundred years, but recovers, and renews her beauty and her strength. She often told me that she envied the dead ; she has seen nations die, if her tale be true, and pass away as if they had never been ; but she can never know the joy of dying to be at peace and rest—but remains an outcast of God and man !’

Gerard’s blood ran cold as the Rabbi’s words recalled some of those very speeches of Salome which he at the time, not unnaturally, deemed raving. Could it be that she was to wander the earth for uncounted ages, long after *he* had passed away ? It was a horrible and mysterious thought, repugnant to common sense, and he said as much to the Jewish Rabbi, briefly and coldly.

'I agree with you,' said the latter; 'but remember that, as a writer felicitously has it, "there is a brass wall bounding all our inquiries (into the supernatural), against which we may strike our heads, but over which we cannot leap," and we have lost the art of reading the Celestial Alphabet, like those who lived in the days of Jabaster. But I must own that, whether simulated, studied, or part of a frenzy, her knowledge of places, persons, and events has ever sorely puzzled me: for it seems to me ever on a past, and not a present period, her mind appears to dwell.'

Gerard was so lost in distressing and perplexing thoughts that he scarcely heard what Dr. Ascher said, for the weird story of the latter seemed in some way to be corroborated by her undoubted horror on seeing the grisly human head placed in the hand of that concealed portrait of herself—that portrait of which she alone had the knowledge—by a strange artistic coincidence, by a second pencil at a later time. His mind wandered rapidly over all his past intercourse with her, and he recalled her singular knowledge of his own secret thoughts and wishes. By what mystery was she to be woven up with his existence, so much so, even, that in name and personal appearance she was identical with the heroine of his novel? And her story—what was it—madness or romance? In Gerard's heart and in his memory, and over all his future life he feared—for love was mingled now with fear—a shadow was enthroned, in the image of Salome; he felt more bewildered than ever, and sorrowful, indeed, as he bade adieu to the Rabbi, regretting that he had ever thought of visiting him.

'In wandering from place to place, Herr Doctor, I may—nay, must find some trace of her,' said he.

'A vain idea,' replied Doctor Ascher; 'she will elude you if she desires to do so; and better will it be for you never to look upon her fatal face again. You might serve for her thrice as long as Jacob did for Rachel, and be no nearer the end.'

Brooding over the incredible story he had heard—the key to such fabulous antecedents—he walked slowly homeward to his hotel, with his chin sunk on his breast. If her life, from any circumstances, real or pretended, lay so far, so utterly apart from his life, why had Fate thrown them

together ; why, even for a time, did they seem to be so thoroughly *en rapport* with each other as on that night at Zevenaar, beside the Rhine ? He grew weary—wearied of conjectures ; but he could not believe that he had really lost her—that she was gone for ever ; and for some days, by mere force of habit, perhaps, he hovered about those familiar meeting-places where there seemed to linger still the charm of her presence ; and daily he went to their place of parting at Michelsberg. It could not be in nature that she was the mythical and mysterious being the Rabbi Ascher described ! Were not the places at which they had met and parted all unchanged ?—the shady road that led to the ruins of Sonnenberg, the sweet acacia walk by the solemn Jewish Friedhof, and the gay gardens of the Cursaal, where yet remained some of the beautiful creamy Gloire de Dijon roses, in which she had, with almost childish rapture, buried her fair, sad face ; and yonder was the gallery of the Cursaal, wherein he had overheard her strange conversation with the ill-fated young Baron of Sonnenberg : and he almost wept for the living—the mysterious living—tears as bitter as he could have shed for the dead—for dead she seemed to be, under any circumstances, to him. He would have gone again to the chamber discovered in the palace, to gaze upon the picture which had brought so much to pass, and reassure himself that the whole of that episode was not a delirious dream : but he had read in the *Wiesbadener Tagblatt* that it had, by exposure to the air, crumbled away, and that not a vestige of it remained. This was, perhaps, fortunate for Gerard. He loved a woman who, though neither wife nor widow, was neither to be wooed nor won—a living myth, a miracle or an imposture ! These ever-recurring thoughts produced a serious illness, which fettered him to his bed for weeks at Wiesbaden ; and when he began to recover he felt that he could think more calmly of the affair, as of a pleasant dream or of the dead. The dead ! But was she not living still, and wandering—where ?

‘ How many months and years there are of life to be spent, and even when life is over, I may not—shall not—meet her, if her story be true—*if her story be true !*’ sighed poor Gerard, as he tossed feverishly on his pillow. ‘ Am I crazed, or is

she? or is that old devil of a Rabbi an impostor and a trickster, who sought to befool me? Would that I had never come to this fatal place at all! Yet her letter—her farewell letter—details so distinctly, so truly, to all appearance, the place where lie those important proofs we require, that there must I go at once—there, were it only to test her words, and for dear Julian's sake!

CHAPTER XXXVII.

GERARD IN LONDON AGAIN.

‘MEDIocre enjoyment is far likelier to be our lot in this world than ecstatic bliss, and those who yearn for something more than ordinary are apt to be left in the lurch without anything at all;’ and in this state of mind Gerard found himself after his illness and the storm of his passion, if we may call it so, had both passed away. Gerard was, in many ways, most unpractical, and as much a creature of circumstances as Julian; he was, as we have shown, more prone to day-dreams than the latter, and now it seemed but too probable that for some time to come such dreams would be his chief relief and resource. The spell that had bound him to Wiesbaden was broken; the bubble had burst; and strongly now came over him the desire to see Julian—to be with him once more, and to hear his pleasant voice—Julian, whom he hoped by this time to find well and prosperously employed in London.

‘How can I ever tell him of this strange love affair of mine?’ thought Gerard. ‘People are naturally hard of belief. All that I have to record seems beyond the bounds of reason, and how can I describe a creature so strange, so wayward, and mysterious as Salome? Better not speak of her at all!’

Avoiding Cologne, the Rhine, Zevenaar, and Rotterdam, with all their recent associations—from which circumstance we may suppose that he was now healthier in mind as well as stronger in body—Gerard proceeded by Liege and Brussels to Ostend, and in due time found himself in London, where, when he presented himself at his old lodgings, the landlady scarcely knew him, so much did he seem the ghost of his former self; for although he strove not to think about Salome, her letter, which he bore always with him, and to which he

frequently referred, as he had the strange contents of it to act upon, served to keep her image ever before him. He was now to experience his next bitter disappointment. Julian, whom he had hoped to find in their old dull rooms, or of whom he never doubted to hear tidings, had left there long since, and gone no one knew whither. But he extracted from their former hostess with difficulty—for the good woman spoke unwillingly, as not wishing to pain him—enough of Julian's story to wring his affectionate heart ; for he now learned how nothing monetary had been forthcoming after the production of the luckless romance, and that consequently Julian had not, as he (Gerard) expected, benefited thereby ; and how, as his funds too evidently sank lower and lower, he had taken humbler rooms in succession, till he reached the attics ; how, in the cold weather, to save fuel, he went without fires, affecting, with a forced smile, to be quite warm enough ; how the paleness of his face and the attenuation of his form, as his last faded suit seemed actually to flap about him, showed that he must often have been without necessary food ; yet when she had begged him to join her at tea, or a little supper, he had invariably refused, but always so sweetly, though it was evident the offer hurt him. And then how at last there came a day when, after duly paying all he owed her, he went forth and returned no more—forth into the human wilderness—the living tide that seethes, and roars, and bubbles round the great dome of St. Paul's, and by the shores of that dark and muddy river which so often hides for ever the fate of many a homeless and despairing wretch.

‘And this penniless and friendless creature who thus went forth into the streets is my brother—he who ought to be, and is of right, the Lord Hermitage!’ thought Gerard, with a gush of bitterness and fierce sorrow in his heart.

Of his aim, object, or intention, Julian had said nothing, nor had he given a hint of whither he was going ; indeed, at the time referred to, the unfortunate fellow knew not himself. Hence, Gerard knew too well that to attempt to seek him were a task as vain as seeking to make a rope of sand. He could but endeavour to hope for the best, and trust to the doctrine of chances : but his heart, a tender and affectionate one, often died within him with apprehension ; for Julian was

the only human being in the world who shared his blood, or whom he could claim as a relative. The idea of their father never occurred to him, either as an object of regard or inquiry, and much less of interest. So for many days Gerard wandered in the crowded streets, hoping that he might by some fortunate chance meet his brother ; but he pursued this daily task in vain. More than once did his heart leap and his footsteps quicken on seeing some real or fancied resemblance in a passer ; but it leaped only to sink again with disappointment. Once he came upon a figure and features that he recognised—that there could be no doubting ; the closely-shaved and colourless face, the sprucely-cut but rather faded costume, the very shiny hat, paper Shakespearean collar, and the general jaunty air of Mr. Algernon Spangles, who was smoking a cheap cigar in the Strand, and who started with an amusing and suggestive, but evident trepidation, when Gerard laid a hand on his shoulder.

‘What, Melville, Gerard Melville ! dropped from the clouds ?’ exclaimed the jolly little actor, as he grasped the latter’s hand with energy and real pleasure, for he was a kindly-hearted Bohemian.

‘Can you tell me aught of my brother ?’ asked Gerard.

‘I cannot.’

‘Why ?’ asked Gerard, breathlessly.

‘I have not seen or heard of him for months.’

‘Months ! And how was he looking when you saw him last ?’

‘He seemed at low water, poor fellow ; and, with all his natural pride, he was not too proud to let me, who am too often in that condition, share a sovereign with him.’

‘For that I thank you.’

‘Not at all—don’t say so.’

‘Where was he living then ?’

‘I cannot say—I don’t believe he knew himself.’

‘And this was months ago ?’ asked Gerard, with a sigh.

‘Yes, but I cannot tell you to a day.’

‘Where was he going ?’

‘Westminster way. In fact,’ continued Spangles, speaking with reluctance, and unwilling to pain Gerard, ‘he spoke of becoming a soldier.’

‘A soldier—in the ranks? My God!—poor, poor Julian!’

‘Yes, he seemed poor enough, Heaven knows.’

This conversation gave Gerard a clue, and for days he now haunted Westminster, inquiring anxiously among the recruiting staff; but not one, in return for unlimited grogs, glasses of beer, and wine, could afford him the least information, for many who had seen better days were, they owned, apt to take Her Majesty’s shilling under assumed names. One day when, sunk in sad thoughts, Gerard was loitering near Hyde Park Corner, a young lady passed him on horseback, attended by a groom in the Deloraine livery. She proved to be Amy Kerr, who recognised him instantly, and reined up her nag with a little gasping exclamation of delight and surprise.

‘Gerard!’ said she, stooping, and presenting her tightly-gloved little hand. ‘I knew not that you were in London; we have not seen each other for ages and ages!’

‘And there have been many and sad changes since then, Miss Kerr.’

‘Call me Amy, as you used to do in Ettrick,’ she replied, looking at him earnestly, almost tearfully, for was he not the brother of Julian? He was handsome and thoughtful-looking, with a manly though fair face, and crispy, curly hair of an almost golden tint, and eyes that were womanish in their gentle sweetness. It was a face expressive of noble impulses and high aspirations, and, as Amy thought, so like Julian, indicative of strength of mind and tenderness of soul. Her cheeks flushed as she asked:

‘How is Julian—and where is he?’

‘Would to heaven I could tell you—he has not been seen for months,’ replied Gerard, sadly.

She then told him about the accident that befel Julian in the street, and as she did so her eyes filled with tears, for she loved Julian, the absent, the lost—yea, it might be the dead—with all the strength and tenderness of which her romantic nature was capable. For him she was willing to sacrifice anything—to wait years even, if Fate required her to do so—for sweet Amy Kerr was singularly generous in her nature.

‘I never heard a word of all this,’ said Gerard, with increasing sadness; ‘you may know, perhaps, that I have been in Germany.’

'About another book—so Julian told me ; but you will never conceive a heroine that can surpass your Salome.'

'Salome?' repeated Gerard, faintly, as he started at the name, and as Amy spoke, the Rabbi, Benjamin Ascher, flushed back on his memory—the Herr Doctor, with his thin pointed features, his black glittering eyes, his silvery beard, velvet cap and gaberdine, and, more than all, his incredible story of Salome !

'Yes,' resumed Amy ; 'your old friend, Kate—Lady Deloraine—and I are quite agreed upon that point.'

'And this accident——' began Gerard.

'Julian seemed—do excuse me, dear Gerard, but we are all such old friends that I may say this to you——'

'Seemed poor, you would say ?'

'Yes ; dear Julian,' her voice trembled at the name, 'seemed miserably so, yet he rejected, proudly and coldly, all our offers of assistance, and one day, ere he was fully recovered, he quitted the hospital, and since then has been heard of no more.'

'And did his—did the Earl whose horses trod him down do nothing for him ?' asked Gerard, almost sternly.

Amy blushed deeply, and was silent ; she seemed pained, and Gerard did not pursue the subject ; but on comparing dates it was evident that Amy had last seen Julian long after Spangles had done so ; and thus Gerard concluded that the surmises of the latter had been a mistake ; and that his own inquiries at Westminster were as useless as they were futile. As he gazed on Amy's fair face and masses of bright brown hair, and watched her rapid play of feature, her sparkling expression, and pretty tricks of manner with head and hand, he thought again of the grave deportment and solemn beauty of the statuesque Salome, by way of very contrast.

'I always live with Kate when in London, and am her guest at present,' said Amy, as she shortened her reins ; 'won't you call and see us ?' she added, in her most coaxing manner.

'Excuse me—I do not know Lord Deloraine, and have no wish to do so. I have my brother to seek, and till I find him, or can throw some light upon his fate, I can go nowhere—see no one—settle to nothing,' replied Gerard, half

incoherently ; for the idea of going as a visitor to the house of the haughty Earl, who disowned him, and ignored the existence of himself and his brother, was more than he could contemplate with patience ; while on the other hand, Amy Kerr—she knew not precisely why, unless some instinct told her—was loth to inform him of the Earl's inhumanity to the sufferer, and that he had sternly forbidden the Countess to inquire after him, and that even she, herself, had only done so by stealth and under the matronage of the housekeeper.

Gerard now warmly but hurriedly bade adieu to Amy, who looked anxiously and wistfully after him as he strode along Piccadilly, for with him she lost the link that bound her to the past, and the last faint hope she had of hearing of that Julian she loved so well and generously in her secret heart.

After this meeting Gerard took courage anew, and advertised again and again in the second column of the *Times*, till hope died away, as no response ever came, and the chilling fear grew over him that if Julian had not left the country he must be, indeed, no more. But for Julian's sake, in reality, the single-hearted Gerard cared, perhaps, little for regaining, or asserting, their birthright ; till the conviction came forcibly upon his mind that it was required of him to clear his mother's name and honour by the production of those proofs which Salome had so singularly asserted to be in existence. Moreover, if he was to act in the matter at all, now was the time, for Gerard's funds, impaired by his protracted residence and illness at Wiesbaden, were becoming an object of equal solicitude and consideration ; so he prepared for his journey to the north.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

IN PARK LANE.

SINCE Julian's disappearance from the hospital, before his health was completely restored, Amy and the young Countess had frequently communed together on the too probable misery that surrounded him, and the impenetrable mystery that involved his fate. They even, at times, wept together on the subject ; for Kate was too honest not to feel occasionally remorse mingle with her compassion, while Amy loved

him truly, had ever done so, and had no humility in catching his heart on the rebound, if she could do so--no difficult matter, surely, at his years ; and Kate, yet all unaware for *whom* she had forsaken him, would still gladly have seen Julian consoled for her loss by the love and undoubted beauty of her wealthy friend. And now, too, she knew that for this mythic love, or in the pure indifference to others enforced thereby, Amy had twice refused young Sir Henry Drake, of the Coldstreams, greatly to the surprise of the Earl, and much more to the surprise of Sir Harry himself, who, though he knew she had many admirers, could not detect among them one who seemed to be distinctly a rival. Amy and the Countess were scarcely aware of the wealth and luxuries that surrounded them ; by constant use and wont, state, equipage, and all the accessories of rank, seemed as necessary to them as the air or the sunshine ; so they could but vaguely and weakly indeed shadow forth in imagination the miseries of poverty and all the contingent sufferings it brings ; thus, though they speculated upon it compassionately, they could scarcely realise the depth of destitution to which—if he yet lived—the unhappy Julian might have fallen. And when Amy saw, as she sometimes did, Lord Deloraine and Kate sitting closely and lovingly together, with her head of ruddy golden hair nestling snugly on his shoulder, while he toyed carelessly with her pretty hands—for the *blasé* rake was as fond as it was in his nature to be of his dazzling young wife—she felt full of envy, and wondered when, if ever, she and Julian—that *other* Julian, whose consanguinity to the peer they so little suspected—would have the right to sit thus fondly in the sight of the world. Then the image of the absent or lost was for ever being conjured up by the utterance of his name, as Kate always called her husband by his Christian name when they were alone, or among those with whom they were familiar.

As yet, there had been no prospect of children whatever, and Kate, who loved little ones so much, naturally longed to have one of her own. Girl-like, of course, she had never given a thought to the subject before ; but now that she was married, and had been so for some time, she envied the maternity of other matrons, titled or untitled ; and to please

herself and her husband—who, cosmopolitan though he was, certainly did wish his name and rank to be perpetuated in the tomes of Burke and Debrett—she felt that nothing would make her so proud and so happy as to have a chubby baby of her own—a little Lord Hermitage. And times there were when Kate would shyly steal away the child of a friend into some remote corner, and pour out all the love of her yearning heart in kisses on its little face—kisses that were as innocent as the unuttered hope that heaven might be pleased to accord such a baby of her own. But retributive fate seemed to have decreed otherwise, and certainly, though Lord Deloraine, the last of his line, would fain have seen an heir to his ancient title and historic patrimony, he still could only think of the two handsome sons of Gladys with annoyance, to say the least of it, as their sudden production or recognition would prove but a source of ridicule and gossip. The idea was not to be tolerated for a moment. They would have made him quite a ‘fogey’ in the eyes of the world, and, more than all, of his young wife, ‘though nobody is elderly till he is sixty or seventy now-a-days.’ My Lord Deloraine was a good hater; in fact, his heart had never forgiven any one; and thus he would not forgive Julian and Gerard for the circumstance of being his own sons—sons of whose existence he had been utterly ignorant till that day of the otter-hunt in Ettrick. He was a man full of irony and scepticism in the virtue of every human being except his golden-haired Kate—a hard-hearted, ill-governed, and unprincipled man. Middle-life was creeping now upon the reprobate peer; his first wife, the deluded one, was dead; he had seen her tomb, and looked upon it with heart unmoved and eyes unmoistened—the tomb on which her maiden name, not *his*, was inscribed, as she believed that she had no right then to it, for had not his own lips told her so? And thus she had died with his cruel and relentless lie graven in her heart and soul, and their boys—his heirs—the Lord of Hermitage and Master of Deloraine, were gone no one knew whither, all ignorant, as he imagined, of their own rights and their mother’s wrongs. And yet, with all this, when in his place in the House, or as chairman of meetings held for objects of philanthropy—it was respectable so to act, being

now a married man—few men could express themselves better at times, ‘from the teeth outwards,’ as some who knew him well suggested, on the subjects of morality, religion, and the common good. Yet Deloraine was no hypocrite ; it was only a facility, a way he had—and he felt occasionally that it was a fine thing to talk.

Kate felt more lonely now than during her first season or two in London. Her younger sisters, Ermentrude and Muriella, had, under her auspices, made good marriages, so her old gossip, Amy Kerr, in some measure took their place with her ; while her mother—a cold, proud, and politic old lady—well satisfied with this state of affairs, had gone to Malta, as her husband, Colonel Kingsmuir, had—after all his years of rest and acquisition of wealth—been seized by a warlike mania, and joined, by express invitation, the staff of his old friend Lord Raglan, then the commander-in-chief of our troops in the Crimea. The evening was closing when Amy Kerr, without removing her hat or riding-habit, joined Kate in a high state of excitement, as the latter was seated, lost in thought, in a bay-window of the drawing-room, looking out on the shadows deepening in Hyde Park. Amy had her recent meeting with Gerard Melville to rehearse, duly dissect, and repeat over and over again. So Gerard knew nothing of his brother's fate, or actually whether he were dead or alive, as Amy whispered, her fine eyes welling with tears the while. Where could he be—what doing—how subsisting ? Surmise and conjecture were vain. Kate was puzzled and remorseful, Amy full of sorrow and perplexity ; for since the affair of the accident, and her stolen visits to Julian during his convalescence, the girl had somehow conceived him to be more peculiarly her own. She spoke to Kate in a low voice, as they nestled together in the recess of the bay-window, and half hidden by a huge majolica jardinière full of blooming flowers fresh from the conservatory, lest the Earl should overhear the forbidden subject ; but he, at that moment, was intent upon a Scottish newspaper, a paragraph of which he read and re-read with a grim, yet, oddly enough, a complacent smile rippling over his dark and handsome face. It announced the sudden demise, at Dumfries, of Mr. Uriah Grippie. That worthy limb of the law, upright elder, and industrious burgess

—so ran the local print—had of late years been addicted to somnambulism ; had walked out of an upper window of his house—an old and lofty one—and been killed on the spot.

‘So, so,’ thought the Earl, as he ultimately tossed the paper contemptuously aside, ‘the sole witness who could testify to that affair with Gladys is gone at last !’

Then, as he looked about him and saw the luxuries by which he was surrounded—the heavy velvet curtains shading a suite of beautiful rooms ; the luxury, refinement, and splendour on every hand ; the pictures, china, and other treasures of art ; a cedar log smouldering on the hearth, with Kate’s lapdog coiled up before it in cosy warmth, a thought did flash upon him, but for a moment only, of who and where was the Lord Hermitage ? Anon he started as if with impatience at his own weakness, and drawing forth his cigar-case, betook him to the smoking-room. Though Amy did not waver in her secret regard for the luckless Julian, and often marvelled whether he still preserved the tiny laced handkerchief he had taken from her in the hospital, times there were that, even when alone, her damask cheek suffused with a hot blush, lest the indulgence in such an unrequited fancy were unmaidenly, though none knew of it save Kate, from whom she had no secrets, and none suspected her of such a weakness save the lost one himself, and perhaps Gerard ; and times, too, there were when, not unnaturally, there came to her memory, with real regret and pity, the love that had been honestly offered her by Sir Harry Drake, of the Coldstreams, a young, passionate, and enthusiastic fellow, of a character very different from the *blasé* men about town she was wont to meet in London. Twice—yes, twice—had he laid all he possessed at her feet ; but she was the heiress of Kershope, and valued not money, though she might a title, given by such a husband. She recalled his first proposal, when the Household Brigade were under orders for the East, and when the dread of perhaps losing her for ever inspired him with a tenderness of manner, a power of language, and a resolution beyond himself ; and how he vowed that the dangers he was to dare would make him utterly reckless, without the promise of her love and faith ; how his mellow and pleasantly modulated voice broke at last with the intensity of his emotions,

as the light of her beauty and the touch of her hands as he clasped them, or clung to her, bewildered him. Yes—she could with ease recall every word—the time, and the place, for no woman ever forgets such an episode in her life. Then she recalled his last appeal, on the night before the Guards paraded in front of Buckingham Palace, to take farewell of the Queen, who wept over their departing steps. It was in Kate's boudoir, and they were alone.

‘Do wait—do give me time,’ she entreated. ‘You do not know what you ask of me, Sir Harry—I have not a heart to give—do not ask me to give a promise I may never fulfil.’

‘And the redemption of which I may not live to ask. Speak, speak, Amy ; you are the only woman I ever loved.’

This was perhaps not the case, but he fully thought so at the time.

‘Promise, only promise me,’ he urged.

‘I cannot, and I have already told you so.’

‘Farewell, then, my darling—we part now—too probably never to meet again,’ said he gloomily, as he turned his back and resolutely left her.

She remembered the morning of the march, when the Guards left, and few who saw forgot it, for the heart of mighty London seemed to throb responsive to the beat of their departing drums ; those stirring drums, which were followed by so many who were to return no more.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

WITH THE HEADQUARTER STAFF.

THOUGH it seems but as yesterday since the long peace of Europe that began at Waterloo was broken by the first cannon-ball at Alma, a new generation has sprung up since then, and as the scene of our story changes to the shores of the Black Sea, we may be pardoned in giving a paragraph or two to explain why we fought there, and what it was all about, at the very time the grave had closed over the victor in many glorious battles, when he was laid by the side of Nelson in the crypt of St. Paul's. However little interest Britons might have concerning the disputes between Greek and Latin monks as to the privileges attached to protectorate

of shrines, and over the holy places in Jerusalem or Bethlchem, it was this, in one sense, petty matter that primarily brought us before the walls of Sebastopol. France had become the special protector of these spots, consecrated in religious history, so early as 1740; but on the 5th of May, 1853, in the usual aggressive spirit of Russia, Prince Alexander Menschikoff, who from being the grandson of a pastrycook had become a general, and ambassador at Constantinople, presented an ultimatum there, demanding for 'Holy Russia' the acknowledgment of her protectorate over all the Greek subjects of the Ottoman Porte—or, in other words, an assertion of sovereignty over four-fifths of the Turkish people. Hence the squabble that began about the shrines in Jerusalem suddenly became a vast European difficulty, and, to preserve the balance of power, Britain, Austria, France, and Prussia felt themselves compelled to interfere. In furtherance of his scheme of aggression and conquest, the Emperor Nicholas, on the 26th of June, boldly avowed his purpose of occupying Wallachia and Moldavia, the principalities of the Danube, as guarantees for what he unjustly demanded, and the last-named state was instantly entered by General Dannenberg at the head of a Russian corps d'armée. The powers of Western Europe made many attempts to arrange the fast spreading quarrel; but the Sultan refused to yield, gave the Emperor fifteen days to withdraw his troops, and ordered Osman Pasha, who from being the son of a Croatian peasant had risen to be one of the most renowned of his generals, to take post at Shumla, with 120,000 men. On the 22nd of March, 1854, Her Majesty, by her message to Parliament, announced her intention of aiding the Sultan against Russia, and on the following day we declared war. The Emperor Napoleon also sent forth his defiance, and his fleet speedily joined ours at the mouth of the Dardanelles, while one of the most magnificent squadrons that ever left the British isles sailed for the Baltic, under Napier, famous old 'Fighting Charlie,' to menace Cronstadt, and abide the issue of events. While the land expeditions were in progress, the indignation of Britain was greatly increased by the production of what was named the 'Secret Correspondence,' in which ambitious Russia coolly proposed to her the partition of the Turkish

empire on one hand, while making exactly the same overtures to France, in which *we* were carefully kept out of the scheme ; so the mass of our entire people were unanimous for war.

One of the finest armies that ever left Britain—the carefully developed army of forty years of peace—landed in the Crimea, under Lord Raglan, but only after, by the foulest ministerial mismanagement, it had been left to lose its best and bravest men by pestilence at Varna. Marshal St. Arnaud resigned his post as Minister of War to lead the army of France, having as his second in command General Canrobert ; while the combined fleets of Britain and France, led by Admiral Dundas, entered the Euxine, and inaugurated the terrible drama of the war by the bombardment of Odessa. Lord Raglan, the old one-armed comrade of Wellington, was accompanied by men, as Generals of Division and Brigade, whose names had long been foremost in the annals of the great Duke's victories—those fields which, for the first time, gave Britain a great place in the eyes of the world ; but ere we landed in the Crimea, so fearfully was our army decimated by cholera in Bulgaria that thousands found their grave in the Vale of Aladyn, and thus few of our cavalry regiments could muster more than 250 sabres ; then *winter* was drawing near, and our most sapient ministry sent the army into the field without tents, ambulances, or even ammunition enough in the artillery tumbrils, or a sufficiency of medical stores. Gloriously we stormed the heights of the Alma, captured the seaport of Balaclava, and then, instead of taking possession of the narrow isthmus of Perekop, and thus by one stroke cutting off the entire Crimea from Russia, the allies began to invest Sebastopol on one side, carefully leaving it open elsewhere, so that fresh supplies of men and stores could be readily poured into it by the enemy, who had moreover plenty of time given them to make it almost impregnable. How disease, death, starvation, and privation of every kind, followed and surrounded our soldiers before that fatal place, are portions of history now, and how all these horrors deepened with the winter snows ; yet everywhere was true British pluck always prominent. Truly has it been said that we have among us the best elements to form a military nation ; for our people, though able to endure hardship, and too often

trained to it by the course of events, are prone to create rather than to avoid bodily peril, even in their very sports and pastimes. The first month of winter was drawing near—winter, when ‘January and February, Russia’s greatest generals,’ as the fated Emperor Nicholas called them, were about to take the field, and the sufferings of our Crimean army, sufferings the result of home mismanagement—some there were who said of treachery, and certainly of inevitable parsimony—had nearly reached their zenith, when Colonel Kingsmuir, as evening closed in, was seated in his tent, not far from Lord Raglan’s headquarters, which were in the centre of the lines—the British extending away on the right towards the valley of Inkermann, the French on the left, with their extreme left-wing towards the Star Battery, and opposite to the cemetery of Sebastopol. The Colonel’s abode was a strange affair, half-tent, half-hut, and wholly a wigwam; but therein he sat writing, by the light of a stable-lantern, on the head of one empty flour cask, while another partially cut down had been manufactured into a species of elbow chair for him by his servant; and therein, while muffled in a furred Russian *shoubah*, his mind could not help reverting to his splendid home in Ettrick, and to his three fair girls at home, as he wrote of his welfare and recent events to his anxious wife at Malta. A portion of his hut was made of planks and wattles plastered over with mud, and in that part lay his camp bed, composed of coarse ticking (on an india-rubber ground sheet) filled with fern and wild lavender, that, when not damp with rain, diffused a rather pleasant aroma. The front portion was a bell tent, sheltered by a palisade, and having the earth dug out, forming a species of hole, which enabled him to erect his tall figure without knocking his head against the canvas. This hole was about ten feet in diameter and nearly three deep, while a trench around the outside carried off the rain water or melted snow. This part he playfully named his drawing-room, as a piece of matting from Constantinople covered the irregularity of the floor, and a barrel filled with stones secured the pole of the tent. Horse rugs, india-rubber sheets, and felt mattings, made the place almost, but not quite, a snugger, wherein the necessities of life become enjoyed as actual luxuries,

In a recent affair, when a Russian force came suddenly out from the Redan to scour the works being formed in front of it, his life had been saved by a young soldier of the Foot Guards, belonging to Drake's command, but whose name he had failed to discover. A reward had been offered by the brigadier, in orders, but to the honour of the battalion no man came forward to claim it ; so Colonel Kingsmuir naturally supposed the poor fellow had fallen amid the hurly-burly of that dreadful night ; and his letter was full of this episode, for it was a time when the camp teemed with stories of the murder of our wounded by Russian officers and men alike, even inflaming the minds of all at home and abroad against them. The Colonel's hand became tremulous with emotion as he concluded that which might prove a last letter homeward.

'Be of good cheer, my dearest wife,' he wrote, 'and fear not to look both fate and danger in the face. The kind hand and good will of Him who brought me away in health from that awful valley of the plague in Bulgaria, where so many now lie, where the Thorn of Christ covers all the wild places, will send me back in safety to you and our three durling girls. I have been many times under fire since we landed here ; but as yet, thank Heaven, no fellow-being has fallen by my hand, and save in self-defence, long may it be so.'

He had just sealed his letter with a prayer and a blessing for her to whom it was addressed, when young Sir Harry Drake entered, bringing a fearful blast of cold wind with him ; and in his costume and *tout ensemble* presenting a figure he certainly never thought to cut in this world or any other. His tawny-coloured moustache and beard had outgrown all the aspect they were wont to have in Regent Street and the Row ; he was cased in a rough pilot pea-jacket, patched with pieces of cloth of various colours, and having furred cuffs ; a species of fur cowl or cap covered his head ; he wore long boots of brown leather, that, like his frayed and tattered trousers, were covered with mud from the trenches ; a field-glass was slung over one shoulder ; his canvas haversack, like a veritable beggar's wallet, was over the other ; and a sword and revolver were in his waist-belt.

Such, and so forth, was generally the aspect of most of our infantry officers now, and they had long since ceased to feel either surprise or amusement at each other's scarecrow appearance.

'Welcome, Harry,' said the Colonel cheerily; 'how goes it in front?'

'As usual—men being picked off every hour by the rifles from the Redan, while planting gabions in the zig-zags of the right attack.'

'The daily story,' said the Colonel. 'Be seated on that bullock trunk. You look weary.'

'I have not had a proper meal to-day. I am used up, by Jove! and about as useful now as a third wheel to a gun.'

'What cannot be cured must be endured, Harry,' said the Colonel, laughing.

'I *am* sick of the work here, but what is to be done?' exclaimed the young fellow, as he manipulated a cigar and handed his case to Kingsmuir; 'we can't do the "urgent private affairs dodge" any longer, and one can't send in his papers when before the enemy. However, I hope we shall eat our Christmas pudding inside Sebastopol.'

'So do I, with all my heart. Have you any tidings of that young fellow yet?'

'He who dragged you out of the awful row the other night?'

'Yes.'

'No, not a word Colonel, yet he must have belonged to my mixed command of the Guards—Scots and Coldstream; we had eight killed and twenty-one wounded that night. The Russians are said to have brained two of the former, after wounding them.'

'The scoundrels! He I refer to no doubt perished that night.'

'Bertie Slingsby assures me that he did.'

'Poor lad?'

'Your horse was killed under you.'

'No, by Jove! before I could mount he was killed *over* me, and I must have fallen into the butcherly hands of the enemy, had this private of yours not dragged me up, mounted me on a riderless nag, and kept a whole gang of flat-capped

and snub-nosed Muscovites at bay with his fixed bayonet, while I leaped my horse out of the half-dug zig-zag, and by a miracle escaped, as I before told you, the fire from the Redan at two hundred yards' distance.'

'If alive, the proffered reward must have discovered him.'

'Perhaps not. I have read that when Sir John Moore was carried wounded out of the field at Egmont-op-Zee by two of the Gordon Highlanders, he offered a reward on parade, but no man stepped forward to claim it.'

'Ah, but our guardsmen, London bred, are not wholly unused to quiet tips, and he may turn up yet,' said Sir Harry, laughing, 'and not be so jolly green as your Gordon Highlanders.'

'I only escaped the fire of the Redan by the fog that surrounded us.'

'Fog! by Jove, it was as thick and dark as a London fog in February, or a day at Archangel when the sun is in the south.'

'You have come at a fortunate time, Drake, I can actually give you some supper. Join me in a mutton chop.'

'Thanks, Colonel,' replied the young baronet, whose face actually brightened at the prospect, 'egad, you are lucky! My haversack has been empty for a week, and I have been sponging on every one.'

'The animal was grazing on the hill-side some ten minutes ago, when my fellows shot it, and now its ribs are broiling on a couple of ramrods; and don't forget there is brandy in that jar beside you.'

'Thanks,' replied Drake, as he withdrew the stopper, and half-filled a teacup with the contents. 'Any news from home by the last mail, Colonel? My letters arrived by the drum-major last night, when I was in the trenches in the dark, and we dared not, for fear of the Russians, have a light, even for a cigar, and I could not read them; tantalising, was it not?'

'News—all are well in town—the Deloraines, I mean; and your little friend, the heiress, is with them still.'

Drake coloured perceptibly, and took another sip of the brandy.

'Come, come, Harry, old fellow,' said the Colonel, 'when

thinking or talking of Amy Kerr, don't keep growing red and white by turns, as if you didn't know which tint became you best. It will all come right with the little girl in the end, believe me. I never knew Kate's influence fail.'

'I hope so, Colonel,' replied Sir Harry, cheerfully, and all unaware that the little influence Kate possessed over her friend in this way would all be exerted for *another*.

'Little Bertie Slingsby, of ours, was very soft in that quarter, too.'

'Ah, your cousin.'

Suddenly a sound was heard.

'What is that? Shovels is it?'

'Like enough. Two poor fellows were suddenly struck down by cholera, close by, to-day,' said the Colonel, 'and I ordered them both to be buried in one grave, to save time.'

'But that is not the sound of shovels,' said Drake, starting to his feet.

'No; by heaven, it is the clatter of artillery; and there go the bugles of the inlying pickets!'

'That fellow Mouravieff is at it again; a petty sortie from Sebastopol--a little game we are getting used to; and so,' added Sir Harry, with something in his voice between a sigh and a laugh, 'we shan't have our chops, Colonel, till we drive the beggars in.'

'Ta-ta for the present,' said the Colonel, as they buckled on their swords and repaired to their posts; but we are happy to have to record it was merely an *alerte*. Sir Henry and his host returned safely, and ample justice was done to the efforts of his soldier-cook.

CHAPTER XL.

THE ADVANCED SENTINEL.

AMONG the advanced sentinels from the line of outposts thrown forward to the doomed city in front of the British investing force, on the day after the *alerte*, was one who, like all the rest, was standing motionless on his beat, with rifle 'ordered' and bayonet fixed; his gaze intently directed to the ground in front of him, when not turned, from time to time, to observe the other sentinels on his right and left, all

of whom were so placed as to be able to communicate with each other easily, and with the main body of the picket to which they belonged. Muffled in his grey great-coat, tattered and frayed into holes, and plastered with the genuine Crimean mud, he was in heavy marching order, with canteen and (empty, alas !) haversack. Even his black bearskin cap—for he was a Scottish Fusilier Guardsman—looked faded and worn by constant exposure, and his boots, as shown by the legs of his trousers being thriftily rolled up, were yellow and flat-footed in shape, showing evidently that they had been whilom the property of some slain Russian, and taken to replace those soled with pasteboard, as furnished by John Bull's commissariat. On his hands and round his neck were some of those warm knitted comforters which the kind girls at home sent out in bales to our poor fellows in the East, though, thanks to routine and red-tapeism, too many of them arrived, like the Christmas puddings, not in winter, but in mid-summer. Julian, for it was he, was standing in the full blaze of a sunshine that gave no warmth, for the November breeze that came from the vast waste of the Euxine was chill in the extreme. It played with his crisp curls of darkest brown and his unkempt beard—for neither scissors nor razors were much in use now—and a perfect specimen he seemed of mature and developed manhood. Sorrow, care, and suffering he had undergone to the full, as the curves of his mouth and his melancholy eye showed ; but his figure, set up by infantry drill, was erect and tall, and his expression of face was clear and honest, straightforward and manly, though the gaze of his soft, dark eye became wistful at times. Apart from the enforced humility of his station, and the many hardships of life in the Crimea, after the horror of all he had undergone in London he did not think his lot a hard one. He was but a unit in the force that was to achieve great things, only a private soldier, it is true ; but his officers and comrades—and the wives of the latter, too—had speedily discovered his manly courage on many occasions, his tenderness to women and children, to the sick and the dying, even to the old and the ill-favoured, his steady adherence to every duty, and his contempt of danger. In short, he was one with whom every girl was ready to fall in love, and every

man was ready to fraternise, for he possessed, without knowing it, a subtle but general power of pleasing.

'Here,' he muttered, 'I thought I might live or die unknown and undiscovered by all—my unhappy past forgotten; and already I have been face to face with Colonel Kingsmuir, of all men in the world; but, fortunately, in the night, amid fog and strife, and to this hour,' he added, with a bitter smile, 'he knows not *who* it was that saved him from the bayonets of the Russians!'

Julian's post was on the extreme left of the British lines, and consequently the sentinel next him in that direction was a Zouave on the extreme right of the French. In his rear was the plain, one-storied little cottage, with a union-jack flying above it, wherein Lord Raglan had his staff and all his fortunes. In front, the ground, like all the rest of the country around Sebastopol, was broken up by nature into dreary and precipitous ravines, in many places rocky, parched, and dusty, without a shrub, or tree, or blade of grass, and the roots of the wild vines had everywhere been grubbed up for fuel; but overhead was a clear, cold blue sky, in which the wild sea-mews screamed at times, and against which, when not hidden in the grey, eddying smoke of 'the villainous saltpetre,' Sebastopol stood distinctly forth, with its green domes, white walls, and grim forts, in which the cannon stood over each other, levelled tier on tier, through black, square portholes, while the immediate foreground was full of hollows, made for rifle pits or by exploded shells, and studded by half-sunk cannon-balls, with here and there a Russian leather helmet lying half trampled in the mire. Far away to his right he had occasional glimpses of the grand harbour, where the long bridge of boats with the outer-boom lay, and where the ships of war, with other craft in unknown numbers, were sunk. But stillness never reigned, by night or day, within or around Sebastopol, for the hand of Death was never, never, never idle; and even then, as Julian stood on his solitary post, now and again a shout might be heard, perhaps a mocking laugh, and a puff of white smoke seen to spirt up from a rifle-pit, where a soldier lay *en perdu* taking pot shots at the ramparts, or at an occasional Russian straggling along the bottom of the Inkermann valley; and further

off in the distance, she'lls might be seen soaring in air from the works within the lines of the cemetery, to burst among those of the French. Already such petty episodes had ceased to interest or excite him, and he heeded them no more than he did the wild birds that were scared by the sound, and gave full swing to his own brooding thoughts. So, far away from the strange and varied scene before him, his mind was hovering, while reviewing, as he often did now when alone, his brief past life, with all its vanished hopes and dead ambition—for even that sentiment was dead, though now he was a soldier, and treading the proverbial path to glory—yea, and to the grave. His mother's wrong could never be righted now—and Gerard ! *where* was Gerard ? Of his blighted boyish love he seldom thought at all now, or did so with a smile of indifference. Ended as it had been, such a passion could not last ; but was sure to die, and so, dead it was. It could not exist even as a regret, and so Kate Kingsmuir's existence chiefly came to memory in conjunction with the idea of Lord Deloraine, and, it might be, of Amy Kerr. Of the latter, singular to say, in some sense, were all his tender reminiscences now, for some hearts are so constituted that they must love and cling to something—even a shadow—and Julian was one of these. Thus he thought pleasantly over her past love for him, her tender pity and compassion when he was weak and ailing in that odious hospital, and he pondered fondly over the flattering conviction that, degraded, forlorn, and humbled though he was, she had loved him, perhaps did so still, though she knew not where he was, or how situated ; and then a soft smile overspread his embrowned yet haggard face, as he thought of all that, under happier auspices and had Fate proved kind, *might* have been. He conjured up the bright-eyed and happy girl with whom, in romping days, he had actually played cricket ; with whom he and Kate had often fished—Amy, who, in her childhood, had often, to please him, gone barefoot, with snow-white feet and ankles, wading into the mountain burn, to catch trout and minnows for him. He saw her and the stream too, with its waters gurgling under the bells of the long yellow broom ; overhead the soft blue Scottish sky flecked with white clouds ; and again came to memory the

fragrance of the newly mown clover, the sweetbriar mingling with the wild lilac, and there, too, was the soft, drowsy hum of the mountain bee, and once again he seemed to be in Ettrick Forest. The present passed away; the past returned, and the young soldier felt his heart swell within him as he recalled the lines and the hope of Scott, that in age—

'By Yarrow's streams still let me stray,
Though none should guide my lonely way;
Still feel the breeze down Ettrick break,
Although it chill my withered cheek;
Still lay my head on Teviot stone,
Though then forgotten and alone.'

From this reverie he was suddenly roused by seeing before him a Turkish officer of infantry, who appeared so suddenly that he seemed to have sprung from the ground, so altogether unaware had he been of his approach. Julian shouldered his musket in salute, on which the Turk came close up to him. He was clad, as the Turkish officers usually are, in a surtout and trousers of blue cloth, laced with gold, but simply, as he seemed to be of subaltern rank; he had, of course, a scarlet fez, with a blue silk tassel and the inevitable round brass plate or button worn by all ranks, from the Sultan himself down to the drum-boy, a gold belt and crooked sabre. His face was sallow, with features that had not the pointed keenness of the Turk, but were coarse, irregular, and strongly partook of the Calmuck characteristics; the black beady eyes were almond-shaped, but cunning and cruel in expression; he had a great grizzled moustache, the drooping points of which curved under his mouth like a horseshoe, and he had a livid scar on his face, which had evidently been laid open from cheekbone to chin by a sabrecut. Julian noted all these points at a glance, though quite unaware that this was not the last he was fated to see of the scarred stranger.

'Unless you are on duty, sir, or have a regular permit from head-quarters, I cannot permit you to pass to the front,' said Julian; 'it is against orders.'

'Of that I am aware,' replied the other, in perfectly good English. 'Will you do me the favour to read this?' he added, unfolding a letter, in which Julian read a permission signed by Lord Raglan for 'the bearer, the Said Othman, Yuz-

bashi (*i.e.*, captain) of the Turkish artillery, to pass and repass any outpost of the army.'

'Thanks, sir,' said Julian, as the yuzbashi folded up his paper with a haughty smile.

'I am simply going to see what progress your works are making in front of the Redan and the White Tower.'

Julian, for a moment forgetful of the difference in their positions or relative rank, bowed his assent, whereupon the stranger, deliberately and nonchalantly, took his way straight to the front, and, passing round the left flank of the battery and other works held by the Naval Brigade, disappeared in one of the hollow ways that lay near the Redan. Until the last vestige of his scarlet fez vanished, Julian watched him with some undefinable suspicion of evil—even emotions of alarm, for so sunk had he been in reverie, that the stranger had come upon him suddenly and abruptly; moreover, it came to him like the memory of a dream that he had recently heard somewhere the name of this identical artilleryman, the Yuzbashi Said Othman, and these ideas were fated to take a more consistent form a few minutes after. The Zouave, who was the next sentinel on his left, drew near and called him by name, and turning, Julian recognised a pleasant and handsome young French soldier, with whom he had become intimate, and whom he met often in Balaclava, where, in the improvised French *café*, they had whiled away many an hour over dominoes and the contents of each other's tobacco-pouches.

'What—Achille Richebourg, is it thou?' asked Julian in French.

'Myself, *mon camarade*,' replied the Zouave, drawing closer and closer than discipline permitted to Julian's post, and waving a flask; '*à votre santé*, M. Melville!'

'My canteen is empty—I have nothing wherewith to drink in reply.'

'Take this and finish it; it is the best *eau de vie* of little Pompon, our *vivandière*.'

'Thanks; but I must leave you some.'

'Drain it, I say; do nothing by halves, *camarade*,' said the Frenchman, laughing; but he was one of those gay fellows who laugh at everything. 'If you go into action, empty your

cartridge box ; if you uncork a bottle of wine, finish it ; if you love a girl and wish to win her, never leave off till you do so. Drink, Julian ! *sacré*—that is the stuff to make moustachios sprout.'

'You saw a Turk just now?'

'I have seen him for some time,' said Richebourg, the Zouave, as he hung his flask to his girdle ; 'were you asleep, that you did not see him passing along the whole line of your sentinels?'

'Along the whole line?'

'Yes—but in rear, of course ; he then spoke to you and passed to the front.'

'He had a permit.'

'Signed by whom?'

'Lord Raglan.'

'*Don !* I saw his signature once ; it seemed just as if made by a spider escaping from an ink-pot.'

'You forget that he has only his left hand.'

'Ah—a French bullet took off the other at Waterloo. He has been long in harness—a brave old fellow. There are no Turks in this part of the lines. What might that Bono-Johnnie have wanted?' continued the suspicious Frenchman, who, though young, was nevertheless an older soldier than Julian.

'He is the Yuzbashi Said Othman, and merely wished to see our works in the vicinity of the Redan.'

'*Halte là !*' cried the Frenchman, with a laugh, and also with an expression of astonishment in his face ; 'you have been completely done ! That is the name of a Turkish Yuzbashi who was killed in a skirmish a week ago, close by the Ottoman Redoubt. This man has been a *mouchard*, a villainous spy, who has somehow obtained the dead man's papers. It is a trick that is nearly stale already. But here is your officer going his rounds, and I must be off to my post. *Nem d'un Pope !* we have too probably not heard the last of this !'

Achille Richebourg hurried off to his post, and Julian, when he saw Sir Harry Drake approaching with the sergeant of the picket, simply making an hourly round of the posts to see that all were on the alert, felt very much inclined to re-

port how he had been duped, and to repeat all the Zouave had told him ; but he was, as we have said, yet a young soldier, scarcely aware of the vast responsibility involved in outpost duty, and, dreading ridicule rather than danger, he remained silent on the subject ; but the Zouave proved a true prophet in his fear that they had not heard the end of the affair. And ere long he bitterly regretted that he had not duly warned those in authority of the episode, and so enabled them to take proper precautions in time.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE SORTIE OF THE 26TH OCTOBER.

It was the evening after the little episode we have just related, and also the night after the glorious and victorious charge of our slender and shattered Cavalry Division in the valley of Balaclava, and while the Allies were watching a strong force with which their flank was threatened, and having their attention thus in some measure distracted from the regular work of the siege, that the enemy resolved on making one of their usual sorties in great strength from the city, and approaching the lines of the Second Division posted on the Inkermann ridge under General Sir De Lacy Evans, an Irish veteran of the Peninsular War, on whose breast hung the Grand Crosses of the Bath and of the Legion of Honour. Weary with recent trench work and full of thought induced by the apparently hopeless separation from his brother, of whose movements he was now as ignorant as Gerard was of his, and with whom he had no means of communicating, Julian lay in the hut which had been recently the abode of four other Guardsmen ; but two had recently found their graves in the rifle-pits, and the other two had gone to die in what was not inaptly named 'the bloody hospital' at Scutari, so Julian had now the wretched edifice of planking, turf, and mud to himself, with a sand-bag for a bed, and plenty of field mice for companions. Through the open door of his hut he watched, as he lay, the smoke, and heard the din of the cannon and mortars now being discharged at intervals at the troops in the trenches, but simply with a languid interest now, the event was of such daily occurrence. To his practised

ear it seemed as if every projectile had a sound peculiar to itself, as it winged on its way to death and destruction ; and he often thought, in an artistic point of view, that our twelve and thirteen inch shells were really pleasing objects in the dusk of evening or the gloom of night, as they ascended in graceful arcs, with a revolving motion and singing sound ('Whistling Dicks,' the soldiers named them), to descend with deadly precision amid the Russian batteries—a descent instantly followed by the bright flash of the explosion. But on this occasion the din of the enemy's guns fast became terrific—the round shot came swooping with a strange rushing noise ; grape began to whistle fast and fiercely ; while the Russian shells, that generally, from being badly fused, burst in mid-air, spread in fragments that descended vertically with terrible force.

Now the drums beat, and the bugles sounded 'to arms,' and Julian, rushing forth, found the whole of the Second Division falling in, in hot haste, in front of their huts and tents, as a sortie, mustering, as it was afterwards stated, ten thousand bayonets with twenty-three pieces of cannon, came furiously out of Sebastopol, under cover of the fire we have described. The sputtering fire of the pickets fast deepened into a concentrated roar after they fell back upon the main body of the Second Division, while the Brigade of Guards and a Battalion of Rifles from the Fourth Division were on the alert to receive the attack, and General Bosquet moved up five of his French regiments in support. The cruelties to which the Russians had subjected so many of our wounded, the severities with which they had treated many who had been taken prisoners, marching them to Kiew, and farther, on foot, with their hands tied to the manes or tails of Cossack ponies, and every pace accelerated by a cut from a whip or a lance-thrust from the howling sons of the desert who rode behind—these, together with strange rumours that Lord Fitzgibbon, of the Light Brigade, had been captured at Balaclava and been sent to Siberia by order of Colonel Mouravieff, served now to inflame the minds of our soldiers with a personal hostility, hate, and rancour against the Russians—an emotion that the massacre of our seamen at Hango and of our wounded at Inkermann was yet to render more fervid ;

and Julian felt much of this in his heart, with a longing to close in, to grapple with, and be at them with the bayonet, as he watched the dark grey masses coming on, half-seen, half-lost, amid the eddying smoke, with bayonets glittering above their flat caps or leathern helmets, according to the costume of the various corps; and ever and anon their hoarse hurrahs rung out upon the murky air. At first it was imagined that the movement was a mere feint to distract the attention of Lord Raglan from a real and more general attempt to force Sir Colin Campbell's line at Balaclava; but it soon became evident to Colonel Kingsmuir, who had made a swift and keen reconnoissance, that a real attack upon our trenches, and the trenches only, was the object of the sortie, and his information on this matter fully confirmed the suspicions of Sir De Lacy Evans.

If, in action, an officer can know little of what is going on beyond the immediate vicinity of his own regiment or company, still less, infinitely so, can the mere private soldier. Julian felt himself a humble unit then, indeed; he thought ambition had died within him; but now, when he heard the din of the deepening strife, when the colours were unfurled and flying; when he heard the orders issued by his superiors with confidence and bravery—the orders that he had but to obey, and in doing so perhaps perish among the nameless rank and file—his inborn spirit and the courage of his race blazed up in his breast; he repined at the humble rank he held, and with clenched teeth and a fierce bitter sigh, as he loaded, cast about, reloaded and capped his Minie rifle, he thought he would die happy could he do so in his right name and character, as Julian, Lord Hermitage! Led by Mouravieff, it was alleged by some—by Prince Gortschakoff, it was said by others—the Russian columns rushed at a quick double march across a ravine, formed in line, and advanced with fierce rapidity, till smitten by a tremendous fire from our batteries, when they halted, wavered, closed in over their piles of dead and wounded, and continued to pour in their file-firing with such precision and rapidity that it seemed as if one might as well hope to escape from the rain-drops of a thunder shower, as that storm of bullets that came singing in the air. Caps were pierced again and again; Julian's bear-

skin was perforated twice ; epaulettes were shot away : Sir Harry Drake had his revolver shot from his side, and his chum and cousin, Bertie Slingsby, had twice a narrow escape from round shot, which lodged in the ground close by and covered him with mud.

Julian's right-hand file had an arm torn off by a cannon-ball, and his breast shattered ; the man on his left, who had lost his bearskin, was killed by a rifle shot in his head, and terribly disfigured. His blood and brains flew over the face of Julian, who, blinded and sick with disgust, fell over some wounded men, and ere he could regain his place in the ranks and clear his obscured eyesight, the regiment had advanced, he lost it in the smoke and confusion, and finding himself among the Light Company of the 95th, he remained in its ranks.

With their artillery—those pea-green painted guns, with which our soldiers were so familiar—the Russian columns broke, and commenced a disorderly retreat, while at the same moment Captain—afterwards Sir William—Peel poured from the sailors' battery a dreadful fire of grapeshot and rockets into their confused ranks and completed their rout.

With wild and exulting cheers—while the Guards were halted in reserve—the troops of the Line advanced in pursuit, driving them pell-mell over the rough and corpse-encumbered ground, where men of the 17th and 34th Russian regiments were lying torn with every species of wound that cannon-shot and shell can inflict. Ultimately they were driven into the very gates of Sebastopol, close to the walls of which they were followed by our troops, whose ardour the officers found it impossible to restrain ; but prior to this, a Russian field officer, whose horse had been shot under him, and whose grey *capote* and flat forage cap made him closely resemble one of his own privates, made a desperate rally with a few, and first checked, and then drove back, a little band of pursuers to which Julian had attached himself. These fell back, firing briskly, to a ridge close by, leaving in the hollow between several of our wounded ; these, the Russians, despite their screams and cries for mercy, proceeded at once to bayonet, and the dismounted officer was seen to despatch more than one unfortunate creature with his sword.

Filled with fury—maddened by this sight—a handful of Champion's regiment rallied on the ridge, and made a rush at them, under an officer, who led them on, crying :

'Follow me, my gallant Derbies, and slate the butcherly scoundrels.'

The ground was re-taken at a rush, and the Russian party put to hopeless flight, but not before Julian—who nearly fell against him in the confusion—recognised in the leader the 'Yuzbashi' of the other day, the Russian spy with the gash on his cheek, and the fierce grizzled moustachios that curled under his mouth !

So this sortie was the result of his visit to the British works before the Redan.

The recognition bewildered Julian, but, nevertheless, he resolved, if possible, that the assassin should not escape ; kneeling, he twice sent a shot after him, as he went plunging down a ravine that led to one of the city barriers, the guns over which now re-opened with shot and shell ; but he was so heated and flushed with the events of the evening, the rush of the pursuit, that on both occasions he missed him, and the bugles of the 95th were now sounding the 'retire !' but this was not effected before the officer commanding the party ascertained from a wounded Russian that this barbarous fellow was no other than Colonel Ivan Mouravieff, who commanded the troops in the vicinity of the White Tower.

On the field lay six hundred Russian dead alone ; our loss was about eighty, and we took many prisoners. Julian had already learned to look upon death with the calm heart and hardened eye of a soldier ; yet now, when the high excitement, the fierce ardour, of the brief conflict and victorious pursuit were ended, and he retraced his steps over the field where the dead and wounded lay thickly among the wild lavender and blue crocus flowers, which grew there in vast profusion, he felt his sympathy moved by many a harrowing sight ; and as he took off his heavy bearskin cap, and wiped the perspiration from his throbbing temples, he looked sadly to the glorious sun that was setting in the west—the west, where lay the land whose glory and interests our soldiers had come hither to uphold—and he wondered if he should ever see it again, or what would be the end of all this wild work.

Our own wounded, and even the Russians, were already being fast borne from the field, but apart from all, in a solitary place, Julian saw one of Bosquet's Zouaves lying, and waving his hand, as if for succour, from time to time ; and on approaching, he was shocked, but not surprised, to recognise his friend Achille Richebourg, suffering from a ball in his leg, round which some comrade had tied a handkerchief, as a species of tourniquet, to stop the bleeding, and then left him to his fate.

'Welcome, *mon camarade*—give me a mouthful of water, will you?' cried the Frenchman, to whose baked lips Julian applied the mouth of his wooden canteen. 'Ah—*sacré* ! you see what your Turkish officer has brought to pass—the vile *mouchard* ! But I did not think the result of his visit would come so quickly.'

'You will scarcely believe, Richebourg, who he proves to be.'

'I neither know nor care—the grandson of the pastrycook himself perhaps.'

'MouraviEFF, who commands in the White Tower !'

'*Mort de ma vie* !—do you say so ?'

'I have tried to pick him off, but failed ; my hands shook so much.'

'I am in dreadful agony,' moaned the Zouave through his clenched teeth, 'and can't endure it much longer. If I am not assisted soon, I shall tear off the tourniquet and quietly bleed to death.'

'Don't speak thus, my friend,' said Julian, as he slung his rifle ; 'I shall carry you to the rear.'

'Carry me—*ouf, mon camarade*, what a baby you must think me !' replied the Zouave, with a grim smile.

With infinite difficulty, for the latter was utterly incapable of assisting himself, Julian lifted him on his own back, and marched steadily off with him towards where he knew the surgeons were at work with sponge, bandage, lancet, forceps and knife, the Zouave alternately groaning heavily with pain, muttering his grateful thanks, and politely tendering apologies for the trouble he gave.

'Do not apologise or thank me, comrade,' said Julian ; 'I know you would do quite as much for me.'

Nevertheless, though strong and sturdy now, he rather staggered under his load.

Achille was a Zouave to the life ; a joyous, jaunty young Parisian, embrowned by service and war in Algeria, his neck bare, as shown by the low-cut collar of his blue jacket, his baggy madder-coloured breeches stained with the mud of the trenches, and with every accoutrement and strap, bayonet and pouchbelt, his 'cabbage cutter,' or charlemagne, canteen and haversack, slung loosely about him.

Julian liked the society of the young Frenchman, he was so much less rough in tone and manners than many of his Guards' comrades ; moreover, brave and worthy fellows though they were, many of their ideas, anecdotes and reminiscences referred to life in London, and so far as his knowledge of it went, Julian would fain have forgotten that.

As they drew near the camp, two mounted officers rode past, evidently on their way to the little cottage where Lord Raglan had his headquarters ; and they proved to be no other than General Bosquet and Colonel Kingsmuir, who checked their horses for a moment as Julian staggered on with the Zouave, who raised his hand in salute to his turban.

'*Tres bon, mon camarade !*' cried Bosquet, with a pleasant smile rippling over his fat brown face, as he held out two five-franc pieces ; 'I thank you for your good care of my soldier.'

'I thank you, M. le General,' replied Julian, blushing scarlet, 'but I must decline to accept payment for doing my duty as a soldier and friend.'

'That is nobly said, my lad !' exclaimed Colonel Kingsmuir, approvingly, but regarding Julian at the same time rather keenly and inquiringly.

'But again I must thank you, *mon camarade*,' said the old General, as they rode off together.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE WOUNDED ZOUAVE.

ORDERLIES and hospital assistants were constantly coming out of, or entering, the great marquee, where a group of regimental and staff surgeons were busy among the moaning,

and too often shrieking, wounded ; their coats off and shirt sleeves rolled up, their hands and arms bloody as those of butchers in a slaughter-house—even their faces were so too ; and the sight that Julian saw, as he staggered forward with his helpless friend, was a very harrowing one, and raised in his heart an emotion of gratitude that he had, as yet, escaped untouched.

Without and around the marquee were many of those who had been slightly wounded, sitting patiently on the ground or on their knapsacks till they could be attended to—pale, silent, and sad in aspect—with, it might be, pensive thought of wives, friends, or parents far away.

The more severely injured by shots in their limbs or bodies lay stretched on the ground side by side, all more or less in extremity of agony, their tattered uniforms stained with blood, while they eyed, some with dogged indifference and others with something of fear, the open instrument cases, the rolls of bandage and lint, and cried ever and anon for water, which was given them by the assistants and two or three French sisters of charity, who were gliding about in their black robes and great white hoods, acting like ministering angels, as they were.

The shrieks of one poor fellow of the 95th, who was having a leg amputated, without chloroform, made Julian's blood run cold, and had a due effect upon the nervous system of Richebourg, the Zouave, as he deposited him on the grass at the door of the marquee, and a wild imploring expression stole into his face, as an orderly with a knife ripped up his loose trousers and exposed a gunshot wound for the examination of a young medical officer.

'Take courage, my friend,' said Julian, to whose hand the Frenchman clung.

'I shall need it all ; more than I ever did when under fire, which I have been many times since, with old Francois Canrobert and Bosquet, I marched against the Arabs at Narah.'

'Don't be alarmed, old fellow,' said the young surgeon laughingly ; 'there is no animal in the world so tenacious of life as a Zouave, and I shall pull you through. Give him some wine from that bottle,' he added to Julian ; 'he looks weak, having lost much blood.'

'*Oui, oui.* When under fire I have no fear of wounds or death either,' continued the Zouave, who did not quite understand what the surgeon said; 'but now—now—it is a very different matter, and—*Oh, mon Dieu!* but this is terrible!' he added in a shriek, as the surgeon probed the wound, and blood spurted forth as from a syringe. '*Monsieur le docteur,* must my leg come off?'

'Not at all.'

'Because, if so, you might as well take my head, for then my dancing and my fighting days were ended together.'

'The ball is lodged here in the fleshy part of the thigh, and out it must come, but the bone is untouched.'

'*Voilà!* out with it then, monsieur,' said the sufferer cheerfully, yet wincing sorely with pain.

Patients were crowding in fast, there was no time to lose; the forceps were speedily resorted to, and the ball was snipped out, with a deluge of blood, amid which operation poor Achilles fainted, and ere he came round again the wound was dressed, bandaged, and the young doctor was busy on another soldier, whose arm was taken at the socket, a terrible operation, under which he died.

We had then no Army Hospital Corps, no Krankenträgerlike the Prussians; orderlies alone—or men told off for 'fatigue' duty—bore the wounded away to the places improvised as hospitals. Those of the French were at some distance from the scene of that day's operations, so Julian, with the aid of a comrade, conveyed Achilles Richebourg to the hut of which he was, as yet, the sole tenant, and would likely be so until a new draft for the regiment arrived.

And most grateful was the young Frenchman for this arrangement, as his fate, even among his own comrades, might have been very different. The medicines in store for our troops were of the commonest kind, and were often short in quantity; but the French medical staff, so boasted of at first for its efficiency as far excelling ours, had now become quite as ill-provided in all the necessary stores and appliances for their wounded, who, in thousands, were shipped off for Marseilles and elsewhere, often in steamers that were without pallets or even straw for them to lie on, with their wounds undressed, without a surgeon on board, their nursing, if any,

devolving, like their burial in too many instances, on the compassionate crew.

From his character, his education, and fate, Julian, though liked and respected by his brother soldiers, lived a somewhat isolated life among them—a life that on service, and before the enemy daily, he tolerated better than he could have done if in barracks.

Their thoughts, their conversation, their turn of mind, their past and their probable future, were not as his ; yet, by nature, he was affectionate, loved society and the companionship of a friend. The Frenchman, by his politeness of manner, his general *bouhommie* and bearing, in some sense supplied this blank, and became a source of interest in his eyes, while the task of attending to his little wants became a pleasure to Julian, whom in the past months his half-boyish ways and strange anecdotes of Algerian life amused, and often weaned away from his own sad thoughts.

With Achille he now resolved to share his humble and too often most wretched rations, which, being barely enough for one, could be scarcely enough for two ; his green unground coffee, boiled in a camp-kettle, on a fire made of vine roots and stray scraps of wood, and which many a time was extinguished by the pouring rain ; his hard ship-biscuits, par-boiled tough pork and salt junk, for Soyer's system of cookery was yet unknown in the Crimea ; but the wounded man required other things that were as much beyond his reach as gold or precious stones ; and hardy soldier though the Zouave was, he recoiled from much that the English mess-cook provided, and said that he could make a better dish out of one of his old boots.

'Ah ! comrade Julian,' said he, on one occasion, 'I should like you to taste such a *poulette à la Marengo* as Renée of Ours, the 3rd Zouaves, and I, made on the night after Canrobert stormed the rocks of Narah from the pestilent Arabs. Shall I describe it ?'

'If the story does not give me a useless appetite.'

'I sharpened my cabbage-cutter,' said he, pointing to his sword-bayonet, 'cut the poulette, or what passed for such into quarters, seasoned with pepper, salt, and some mushrooms that grew with the garlic by the wayside ; then we

skimmed off the oil, added some lemon juice from the nearest lemon tree, with some chopped parsley, and served it up hot. *Ma foi !* even old Bosquet, who was our Colonel then, tasted it with delight, and looked as if he could have eaten his four fingers and thumb ! The only thing he objected to was the poulette itself.'

'Why?'

'Because we had to make a young monkey do duty as such.'

On the second day after the extraction of the bullet, Julian found, on returning from some patrol duty, that the young surgeon had re-dressed the limb of his guest, and that the latter seemed to be too evidently sinking from the lack of some necessary stimulant, such as a glass or so of wine, which he had not the means of procuring in the camp, unless he almost begged for it at some officer's hut, and reluctant to do this, lest the request might be misinterpreted, Julian searched his pockets and bethought him of Balaclava.

The search was somewhat a useless one, and was perhaps mechanically done, as Julian knew but too well that till next pay-day he had only a shilling in the world ! Then, by the association of ideas, his memory flashed back to the day when he met the jaunty Mr. Algernon Spangles, who lent him ten of these coins, and told him to pass them, as repayment, to the 'next fellow' who might be in need of them.

How little could Julian then foresee that the personage so indicated would be a French Zouave in the huts before Sebastopol ! He smiled a grim, proud smile of contempt, when thinking that though he was a soldier now, helping to win battles, the story of which (without his name, alas !) would go down to posterity, he was still in a condition so sordid—he, the Lord Hermitage.

'Always that thought,' he muttered, as he bade adieu to Achilles, and after obtaining the necessary permission, set out on his way to Balaclava, the memory of the poor young Frenchman's pale face urging him at every pace of the way.

The evening was dull and grey, and a bitter wind swept up the gorges from the Black Sea, as he left the camp behind, and on gaining the summit of an eminence he halted and looked back, and then, for the first time, was astonished by its apparent immensity of extent,

In every ravine long rows of white tents, or grotesque huts, with bare spots around them, were visible, and all the rugged paths that led to them were constantly being traversed by dragoons in stable-dress taking horses to water, by rumbling waggons full of ammunition and stores, strings of mules laden with wood, food and forage, by mingled British and French soldiers of all arms, by Croats, Greeks and Tartars, picturesquely clad and armed, but brown-skinned, black-bearded and melodramatic looking ruffians.

But with all these details he was too familiar now to linger long, so, turning once again, he hastened on his way, and in about an hour found himself, after trudging down hill, in the little town of Balaclava, the harbour of which was crowded with British and French shipping of every description, with man-of-war boats incessantly shooting to and fro, and everywhere were seen floating about the swollen and odious carcasses of cavalry horses, that had recently perished in a transport, by all breaking loose and kicking each other to death.

And now, with some interest, Julian looked for the first time on the great convent that crowns one of the cliffs, a thousand feet in height above the harbour, and on the walls of which, the last red rays of the sun were fading away, as they also were on the battlements of the now ruinous Turkish castle.

The neat white houses of the original town, shaded by tall poplars, and inhabited by Arnaouts—the descendants of those Greeks who aided Catherine the Second in the conquest of the Crimea—were filled with soldiers of the Allies, and amid them innumerable huts and wigwams, in use by the latter as shops and stores, had sprung up.

The few shops in the place were chiefly kept by Maltese, who were too poor to invest in anything good, or in an extensive manner, but they charged the most exorbitant prices for everything; and Julian felt his heart sink as he saw the prices placed upon their wares—even a bottle of Bass being marked two shillings.

A few months later saw a great change, however; at Kade-Koi, which is close at hand, quite a little town of new huts sprang up, where every ordinary want, and also little luxuries, could be had, and where even railway publications were procurable at the open-air stalls kept by the Maltese.

Julian looked round him wearily, and began to fear he had come on a bootless errand ; and sooth to say, from much trench work of late, from hardships, coarse and scanty food, he would well have required for himself that which he only desired for the poor Frenchman.

The idea of obtaining what he wanted at any of the Maltese shops or stalls he abandoned in despair, and was turning away, when suddenly he found himself before a species of general store and drinking shop, over which was an English signboard, and from the interior of which a considerable din of voices and laughter was issuing.

Encouraged by this, he entered the crowded place, which was pretty well stored with tobacco of all kinds, pigtail and Cavendish, etc., Crimskoi wine of the country ; dried tongues that probably were those of horses, wiry hams, suspicious-looking German sausages in strings, hung from the rafters, and other goods of various kinds, for some of which, married soldiers, who, by remittances from home, were always more flush of money in the Crimea than others, were chaffering, together with many sorely bedraggled women from the camp.

Many sailors, orderlies, and officers' servants were there for the same purpose, and all who had money to pay for them were drinking beer and spirits ; thus the keeper of the place and his assistant had more than their hands full, and, as prices went, seemed to drive a thriving trade.

To the former Julian applied, almost timidly—for few things make such a coward of a man as an empty purse—for 'a shilling's-worth of wine.'

'A shilling's-worth of what?' roared the dealer.

'Wine.'

'We don't sell wine by shilling's-worths here, my fine fellow,' replied the other, so gruffly, while busily attending to some one else, that Julian coloured deeply and passionately, for pride and fine feeling had neither been blunted as yet ; 'even a pint o' Bass costs nigh half a crown.'

'Of that I am aware,' said Julian with a sigh.

'Then what the devil would you be at ?'

'May I inquire the price of your cheapest Crimskoi wine ?'

'Five bob the pint bottle.'

'I have only a shilling, sir,' said Julian hoping to conciliate the fellow.

'Then drink swipes. You're a Scotsman, ain't you? Oh, you Scotsmen are knowing blades.'

'I want the wine for a sick comrade, a poor Zouave,' said Julian, and then, unwilling to be defeated, with something of a sigh he drew forth from his pocket-book the little laced handkerchief of Amy Kerr, and with intense reluctance said 'This lace is valuable, I presume; take it in barter.'

'It *is* lovely lace—cost a guinea a yard, if it cost a penny. How did you come by it, soldier? But what is the use o' lace to me? Try the Maltese booths—oh, you Scotsmen, you Scotsmen are such pushing fellows—now, look sharp, Pawsey,' he added to his partner.

Something in the voice made Julian look more keenly at the speaker, and then he instantly recognised him—the Jew rogue who diddled him in London! Though his thick, coarse black hair was not oiled so elaborately as of old, and his costume was quite different, and he did not make such a display of mosaic jewelry, Julian had not the least difficulty in recognising the pretended leading partner of the firm of Hookitt and Pawsey!

So they now kept a general store at Balaclava!

Julian disdained the fellow too much to recur to their past acquaintance, and somewhat expensive interview, and still hoped to get the wine for Achille by means of the handkerchief.

'Tis the truth the poet sings,
That a sorrow's crown of sorrow
Is remembering happier things.'

So he thought, as memory reverted to the sweet, yet sad, moment when he obtained from Amy Kerr this relic of herself, which was thus a relic also, and the sole one he possessed, of his past life—the life that could come to him no more. He was still lingering with it in his hand, when the affair suddenly took a new turn,

CHAPTER XLIII.

AMY'S HANDKERCHIEF.

It chanced that among the motley and varied customers of Messrs. Hookitt and Pawsey that evening was Sir Harry Drake of the Coldstreams, chaffering, with some amusement to himself, for a bundle of cigars. While thus employed, and stowing them away in his haversack, he saw the whole episode of the handkerchief, the sad, expressive face of Julian, and man of fashion though he was, or rather *had* been, he thought that in all this there was some little history, and regarded his brother Guardsman with more interest.

'This,' thought he, 'must be the *preux chevalier* of whom Kingsmuir spoke—he who refused the five-franc pieces of General Bosquet; he had a wounded Zouave on his back, and of course for him he wants this wine. Poor devil—he is very kind! You seem a good sort of fellow,' added the young baronet, aloud; 'accept a cigar.'

'Thanks,' replied Julian, bowing; and then hastily raising his hand in salute, as he remembered himself.

'Accept from me also this crown to get the wine you want for your sick friend.'

'A thousand thanks, Sir Harry,' exclaimed Julian, colouring alike with gratitude and pleasure; 'in loan I take it.'

'Loan, don't talk of such a thing to me—and now I must be off to the camp like a bird.' Then Drake added, with a good-humoured smile, 'That handkerchief in your pocket-book is a souvenir of your sweetheart, no doubt—some pretty girl at home—glad I saved it for you—eh?'

'No sweetheart of mine, Sir Harry,' said Julian, coldly, as he put the bottle of wine in his haversack.

'Well—a sister, perhaps?'

'I have only a brother in this world, and he is,' said Julian, in a faltering voice, 'I know not where.'

'Well,' persisted Sir Harry, 'she must be, at least, some dear friend that you treasure it thus, or would only part with it in performing an act of mercy! One doesn't meet with such romance now-a-days, and this is quite refreshing,' added the baronet, scraping a match and lighting a cigar, while handing one to Julian for the same purpose.

'A dear, dear friend, indeed,' replied Julian, with some emphasis, as the girl, in all her bright and tender individuality, now removed from him like a planet in another sphere, came before him in imagination.

'That lace shows she has excellent taste,' said Sir Harry, as Julian, with an irrepressible sigh, was replacing, with care, the handkerchief in his pocket-book; 'what is that in the corner?'

'Her initials.'

'And a crest?'

'Yes, Sir Harry.'

'A crest, by Jove—a crest!' and he laughed with great good-humour; yet the laughter grated unpleasantly on the ear of Julian, till the quick eye of Sir Harry Drake saw what the crest *was* and what the initials *were*. Then the expression of his face and the tone of his voice—nay, his whole bearing—changed instantly.

'Was the owner or donor of it a lady?' he inquired.

'She is a lady, Sir Harry,' said Julian, with a thickening voice.

'And how named?' was the blunt question.

'Excuse me, Sir Harry Drake; but you ask too much.'

'I do not ask in a tone of authority,' said the officer, endeavouring to dissemble or conceal his annoyance, 'for authority I have none in a matter like this; but the crest is one with which I am perfectly familiar.'

'It is that of the Kerrs—there are many of the name in Scotland.'

'But only one of Kershope.'

'It is the crest of that family, sir,' replied Julian, thinking the inquiry had proceeded quite far enough, and clasping his pocket-book, he replaced the latter in the breast of his sorely frayed red coat.

'Under what circumstances, pray, did you obtain the handkerchief?'

'Now, Sir Harry, pardon me, but you are adopting the very tone you repudiated.'

'Pardon me—I have no right, perhaps, to inquire;' and then he thought, 'No doubt some servant wench or dressing-maid has appropriated it and given it as a souvenir of herself

in Kensington Gardens or the Green Park ; of course, how else could he obtain a handkerchief of *hers*—of Amy's ? But I'll have it, any way !

'For that trifling thing,' said he, 'an article which, of course, cannot have the slightest personal interest to you, I will gladly give you a sovereign—even five sovereigns, if you will.'

At whatever price it was won, it would be, he thought, a pleasant surprise, a pretty compliment, to Amy, that he had found a souvenir of her in the Crimea, so he drew forth his purse, on which Julian retired back a step.

'I thank you sincerely, Sir Harry, for the crown you have so kindly lent me, and I shall, if spared, repay it with gratitude ; but——'

'Stuff—you must not adopt this tone to me !'

'But for uncounted gold I would not *sell* that handkerchief.'

'Yet you offered it, not a minute since, to this fellow, the sutler, here !'

'In a work of mercy and human charity for another, not myself ; and she, whose it was, would not disapprove of my doing so,' replied Julian, with a profound salute, and preparing to withdraw.

The presence of Sir Harry in that bustling place did not quell either the fun, noise, or laughter of the toppers, or the angry remonstrances of the ladies of Corporal Brown or Private Smith, as they were striving in vain to 'cheapen' the exorbitant charges of Messrs. Hookitt and Pawsey, as an officer's costume was fast becoming very ill-defined within sound of the guns of Sebastopol.

Thus every one was so busy around them that none took heed of the remarkable conversation between Julian and Sir Harry Drake.

Something of anger mingled with the surprise of the young Guards' officer, that he—a club-man, a baronet, a man-about-town—should be brought thus in juxtaposition with a private soldier of his own brigade about a girl's handkerchief ! But, then, that girl was Amy Kerr, who had twice refused him ! However, he should condescend to sue or inquire no more ; but turned on his heel and left the place.

'This fellow is some romantic ass,' thought he, as he mounted his horse and galloped towards the camp at a rasping pace, for he had a vague feeling of irritation on the subject ; and he suspected, from the singular expression of Julian's eye, and the inflection of his pleasantly modulated voice, that there was some mystery, difficult to unravel, unless he fell back on his former idea, that the donor had been a waiting-maid.

For some undefinable reason the young baronet said not a word to his most intimate friend, Colonel Kingsmuir, on the subject ; yet he would have blushed to own himself uncomfortable about it.

Who the deuce was this mere private, who indulged in melodrama, who gave himself such devilish undefinable airs, and all so quietly, too !

Julian felt provoked by the turn the affair had taken, and dreaded lest his incognito might be taken from him, as he had a nervous dislike of becoming known now to Colonel Kingsmuir, as he was ignorant how much the latter knew, or did not know, of his secret history. But the real truth was, that the Colonel knew nothing about it at all, and thought no more of Julian Melville, the lad in Ettrick, than of the last year's snow.

There were many tempting and most eatable condiments displayed in the varied establishment of Messrs. Hookitt and Pawsey ; but Julian could only buy a small loaf to share with his French guest ; and now, half-starving as he felt himself, he took in another hole in his waist-belt, to stay the craving of nature, and turned his back on Balaclava, facing the wind, now more than ever keen, since darkness had fallen, that came whistling from the Euxine, round the bleak marble rocks of St. George's monastery.

Thinking over and over again his recent conversation with his superior officer, and wondering why *he* had so much interest in a souvenir of Amy Kerr, Julian, lost in thought, trod hastily and manfully among the narrow, rough, and in many places odiously muddy uphill road that led to the camp, the faint lights of which ere long he began to see twinkling before him, between the spurs of the hills in the hollows wherein the tents were pitched and the huts built.

Already he had passed all the patrols and advanced sentinels, thrown towards the rear along that part of the road for the preservation of order among the many wild and half-lawless nationalities peculiar still to the ancient Chersonesus Taurica, and he had already entered the rough hollow way that diverged from the vicinity of Lord Raglan's quarters, towards the huts of the British left attack, when an unforeseen accident befell him.

The sling of his haversack—decayed and rotten by incessant wear and exposure to the weather—gave way, and the latter, with its contents, rolled down over some rocks and vanished from his sight.

Poor Julian stood like one bewildered—cut to the heart by a catastrophe so sudden and irremediable; overcome by much that he had of late undergone, toil and want of food, as he thought of the poor sinking Frenchman, for whose comfort he had hoped to do so much, his heart was wrung, and an emotion gathered in it, not unlike that described by Cobbett, the M.P., when, as a poor private soldier, he lost in his barrack the only halfpenny he had in the world, and adds, 'I drew my rug over my head and wept.'

He was loth to disappoint his friend of the hope held out to him, and felt the dire necessity of getting him the little comfort required. Close by was an officer's hut, so he now resolved to make there the request from which he had previously shrunk nervously.

Half hut, half tent, a light, and voices conversing merrily, encouraged him to approach, and he knocked on the extemporised door of plank and wattles.

'Come in,' cried a voice authoritatively.

Entering, he found himself face to face with the very man he wished to avoid—Colonel Kingsmuir, for the abode was his, and the two friends who were with him proved to be Bertie Slingsby, of the Coldstreams, and his cousin, Sir Harry Drake.

Confusion, and a certain sense of mortification, were the first emotions of Julian, who felt his head begin to swim.

'Why, fellow, you are tipsy,' said Colonel Kingsmuir.

'Excuse me, sir—I certainly feel giddy,' faltered Julian, as the well-remembered voice of other days fell on his ear; 'I

have had much hard work in the advanced trenches of late, and have been without food for many hours.'

'How about the wine I gave you at Balaclava, not an hour since?' asked Drake.

'It was of that I came here to speak, venturing to the hut because it was that of an officer,' said Julian; and then modestly, firmly, and distinctly he told his little story, and ended by begging from Colonel Kingsmuir a little wine—not for himself—but for the wounded Frenchman.

'Oh—aw—it was you, then, that General Bosquet and I met near the Woronzow Road, carrying a wounded Zouave?' said the Colonel.

'Yes, sir.'

'By Jove, you are a fine fellow! There is a bottle of sherry to replace what Sir Harry gave you; and drink this—you seem to want it,' said the kind Colonel, filling a bumper of the same wine and handing it to Julian, whom Sir Harry was still eyeing curiously and dubiously, while twirling his now bushy moustache.

There was now much of hauteur in his bearing toward the private soldier, the simple *soldat*; the Crimea, its *camaraderie* and its miseries vanished, and London, with its memories and influences, took its place.

Though Julian loved and longed for the kindly recognition of such men as those in whose presence he stood, his innate pride made him shrink from it; he always felt himself to be the Lord Hermitage, nervously sensitive of patronage, gossip, or ridicule; and with the unold secret of being so, he would die, and, at times, cared little how soon. He was about to withdraw, with a low bow, as occasionally he forgot the salute inculcated by discipline, when the Colonel, who was standing, now spoke again.

'I have been given to understand that you were the advanced sentinel whom the Russian spy deceived by showing a dead man's permit?'

'Yes, sir.'

'You would know that scoundrel again?'

'Among a thousand, sir, and I did so in the late sortie.'

'He was killing the wounded?' asked Bertie Slingsby.

'With his own sword, and inciting others.'

'A lonely post like that should have sharpened your wits, young fellow,' said Sir Harry Drake.

'I have felt lonelièr in the Strand,' said Julian dreamily.

'Are you a Londoner?' asked the Colonel.

'No, sir, a Scotsman.'

'Ah—your name is Melville. From what part of Scotland?'

'Now,' thought Julian, with irritation, 'the mask will be torn from me!' Thus he answered vaguely :

'From the south country.'

Now, though Julian had sat scores of times at the Colonel's dinner-table at Kingsmuir, so completely had he passed out of the Colonel's life, or sphere, that even his voice failed to induce recognition. The Colonel could not see the whole of Julian's face ; his bearskin cap and brass chain, with his moustache and beard, hid much of it ; yet he could see that the features were clearly cut, and delicate ; the mouth full and sweet, yet firm in its curve, and that, though his uniform was verging on the ragged, he looked a picture, while his gloveless hands were shapely, white, and more delicate than one usually saw in the ranks—and, more than all, could see in those days of trench work before Sebastopol.

He regarded the young man with vague, but growing interest ; for the classically-cut face he possessed, if it indicated sweetness of disposition, also showed much of suffering, humiliation, and indifference of death.

In its contour—but not at all in its expression—it reminded him of another face, he could not then say *whose* face ; but the one hovering in his memory was that of his own son-in-law, the Earl.

Moreover, he had only seen Julian in the night, when, amid a dense mist, and fierce attempt to scour our trenches, the latter had saved his life and remounted him ; but now he fully believed that the gallant fellow for whom he had made so many futile inquiries had fallen in action.

'You speak with a strange tone of despondence, young man,' said the Colonel ; 'do you not like soldiering?'

'I do, sir. Apart from the glory of it, when here under fire, a fellow is cured from always thinking of what might have been, by the knowledge that a bullet may the next minute make it of no account ; once we are dead, all things

are alike in the end. The general and the drum-boy, the king and the clown, lie all alike in their graves.'

'You seem to be a philosopher,' said the Colonel, laughing.

'He is the queerest fellow I ever came across,' said Bertie Slingsby, with a languid drawl; 'and yet by Jove, I like him.'

'Work is a blessing, sir,' said Julian, dreamily, as if speaking to himself; 'it saves many a heart from breaking; and work we have in plenty before Sebastopol.'

'And rather infernal work it is,' said Sir Harry, as Julian laughed bitterly, saluted, and withdrew, betaking himself at once to his hut before tattoo roll-call.

'There is,' said the Colonel, 'a touch in all this of the sad, that savours of some disappointed or wasted life.'

'Of bosh, rather!' exclaimed Sir Harry, thinking pettishly of the affair of the handkerchief.

'Don't say so; I think better of the young man. He has, depend upon it, a history.'

'So has every casual and pauper.'

'How can you be so severe; it is not like your usual genial self, Harry Drake,' said the Colonel, almost with anger in his tone.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE ZOUAVE.

THOUGH he little knew the trouble such a trifle had cost as the flask of wine, most grateful and profuse in his thanks was the poor wounded Zouave, who lay stretched on a bed of straw in a corner of Julian's miserable hut, which was lighted by the dim radiance emitted by a piece of candle stuck in the socket of a Russian bayonet, planted in the sod which formed the floor.

Achille Richebourg looked ghastly and pale from the loss of blood; but the pain of his wound had abated, and already he had become impatient to be up and doing, and again with his regiment, though he was still weak as a child; but the incessant noises incident to the siege, by day and night, fevered his ardent spirit, for the booming cannon and the crash of the exploding shell became so incessant that, as a general rule, they ceased to excite either interest or attention,

yet it is affirmed by some that the higher our civilisation rises, the more finely our nerves become strung, and that man is becoming a more nervous animal every day.

Refreshed and restored by a bumper of the Colonel's sherry, a colour came into the hitherto pallid cheeks of the young Frenchman, and a new light into his fine dark eyes ; he propped himself up on a straw pillow, and attempted to sing a verse or two of Beranger's *chanson*, '*Les Deux Grenadiers*,' but failed with weakness.

'Take courage,' said Julian cheerfully ; 'you will soon be well, and we have plenty of fighting before us !'

'Get well ? I should think so, *mon ami* ; did not *M. le Docteur* say there was nothing in the world so hard to kill as a Zouave ? *Pardi*—the Arabs found that out in Africa, and I hope the Russians will find the same thing here before Sebastopol.'

Julian did not reply ; he was sipping his wine from a tin canteen, and for a minute was lost in thought, while replacing carefully the tiny handkerchief of Amy in his pocket-book, from which he had taken it and refolded it.

What did Sir Harry Drake want with that relic of her ? Why did he seem so desirous of possessing it, and how came he to be so familiar with her name and crest ? They must have met in London, or elsewhere, of course.

He did not exactly love Amy Kerr ; but Julian knew that in the past time she was wont to love him, and now an emotion of pique that bordered actually on jealousy came into his heart for a brief space ; and then one of his now bitter smiles spread over his face as he remembered himself, and muttered : 'What am I, to muse or brood over such a thing ? And how would that young baronet, who doubtless deemed me churlish or eccentric in refusing this handkerchief, laugh me to scorn !'

The quick eye of the Frenchman saw his action and read the expression of his face.

'Aha, *mon camarade*,' said he, laughing, but feebly, 'thereby hangs a tale, of course ! Who is she ? Not your wife—you can't have a wife already ?'

'She is neither wife nor love of mine, Achille ; so thus you are, as the sailors say, out of your reckoning.'

‘Your sister, then? though most fellows, as a rule, make more fuss with the sisters of others.’

‘She is not even my sister,’ said Julian, shaking his head and smiling.

‘Then why do you treasure that souvenir so carefully?’

‘I can scarcely say, as it only reminds me of a time of sadness and humiliation; unless it be that it belonged to the only—perhaps the dearest—friend I have on earth; and I think she would be grateful to me for thus remembering how kind and true she is.’

‘She is true, you think?’ said the Frenchman, with a grimace.

‘Yes, Achille.’

‘Of course, as a woman, and grateful as a cat!’

‘You speak strangely.’

‘I have been soured in my time, that is all,’ said the Zouave, turning restlessly on his bed of straw; then he laughed again, and added, ‘Now describe her. She has lovely eyes, of course.’

‘Yes—eyes that promise much,’ replied Julian, entering into the other’s spirit.

‘*Ma foi—oui*—a pretty woman’s eyes always promise many things. Often those who have lost heart—yes, and lost intellect—can make their eyes beam with an expression almost divine. Hence it is that we poor men, poor fools, are so often deceived by them.’

‘Then you don’t think the eyes the index of the soul?’

‘Not of a woman’s soul, certainly.’

‘Why, Achille,’ said Julian, ‘what has come to you to-night?’

‘Only some old memories, *camarade*; that is all.’

‘Forget them.’

‘They are hard to forget.’

‘I was beginning to fear that, in your weak state, the wine, all unused to it as you have been for so long, was affecting you.’

‘Nay, my friend, it is making a new man of me—a thousand thanks to you.’

‘You have a harsh opinion of the ladies, Achille.’

‘Because I have a just one; and as for your fair one of the handkerchief—’

‘Do not speak of her, Achille ; you know not who she is, and must not judge of her by our camp experiences. She is good and gentle, innocent and true.’

‘How you talk !’ exclaimed the Frenchman, laughing at Julian’s earnestness ; ‘how old is your paragon ?’

‘We shall quarrel if you talk thus ; she is not yet twenty.’

‘*Diable* !’ why, all women—even girls of her years—have had at least one secret passion, fancy what you will ; and many do not confine themselves to one attachment, even at once.’

‘How sceptical you are of the sex, Richebourg !’

‘My scepticism is founded on experience.’

‘Of the women of Paris, perhaps ?’

‘I never was in Paris,’ said Achille, curtly ; while Julian’s thoughts reverted to the brilliant and attractive Kate of other days ; but he had no bitterness on that score now, and could not endorse the views of the Frenchman, in whom he had more than once detected an almost comical spirit of misogamy that struggled with his naturally gay and joyous temper, which usually led him to make light of everything, even of his wound ; for he had more than once quizzed Julian as being the cause of it, and of the sortie too, by permitting himself to be deluded by the spy, Mouravieff.

In three days the bullet-wound had closed, and already his spirits became buoyant ; he began to patch, with a ready hand, his tattered blue Zouave jacket, and to speak of repairing to the head-quarters of his regiment on the right of the French attack. He was full of sincere gratitude to Julian for all his kindness and genuine *camaraderie* ; and, as strength returned, he became communicative, and began to speak of his past life, thereby giving a clue to some of the bitterness he was wont to express.

‘I was once not without hopes of being something better than a private of the 3rd Zouaves,’ said he, on one occasion ; ‘but now I am content, for I am alone in the world, and when I get the Cross of the Legion—as I certainly hope one day to do—I will have no one to show it to,’ he added, as a shade of melancholy crossed his face ; ‘not even Thibaud, *mon pauvre* Thibaud !’

‘Who is he ?’

'Was, you should say ; the only relative I had in the world—my brother.'

'And he is dead ?'

'Dead !' replied Achille, as his chin sunk on his breast, and his eyes seemed to dwell on vacancy.

Julian thought of Gerard, *his* only relative, whom he never more might see, with his fair and boyish face, and his kind, affectionate smile ; and somewhat of a fellow-feeling for the speaker filled his heart.

'In some points we resemble each other, Achille,' said he ; 'there was a time when I little expected to find myself what I am to-day—a private in the Scots Foot Guards.

'You too, then, have a story, *mon ami* ?'

'A sad one !'

'Then don't recall it—forget it if you can.'

But after a time Julian learned that the Zouave had been as suddenly plunged into poverty as he himself, and from greater wealth, if not loftier expectations ; and his nervous soul, which—Frenchman though he was—was of the reticent and overwrought type of the sensitive order, was one of those which can feel keenly, think deeply, and endure many a pang when in contact with the coarse, practical, work-a-day world.

By the death of their parents in Algeria, where their father was a Colonel of Chasseurs d'Afrique, Achille, then a youth of sixteen, and his little brother Thibaud, were left to the care of their uncle, the Marquis de Richebourg, who lived almost in retirement near Lyons, in the old château from which they took their family name, and which is so well known to tourists as a 'lion' of the district.

To no more unwilling kinsmen could the orphan brothers have been trusted by the dead Colonel than this elder brother, who by nature was stern, cold, and, dwelling apart from all in the seclusion of his great château beside the Rhone, regarded with extreme disfavour the change their presence was likely to effect in his lonely and loveless existence, as he was notorious in his neighbourhood for his lack of geniality and natural affection ; yet Achille was to be the heir of his title and his possessions.

A book-worm and student, the Marquis spent most of his time in his library, and isolated as the brothers were from all

companions and playmates, when not in the hands of their tutors, they missed sorely the affection of their father and the tenderness of their mother, and a species of quiet sadness fell upon them—on little Thibaud particularly—which was sad to behold in one so young and, by nature, affectionate.

Accustomed only to caresses where the Chasseurs d'Afrique had been quartered, or in the tented camps in hot and arid Algeria, they were wont to wander, hand in hand, and full of wonder, with hushed voices and quiet steps, through the apparently endless rooms of that vast and most isolated château, which is actually built *in* the Rhone, for a great part of the edifice rests on a bridge or series of arches beneath which the river flows, the swiftest river in France, sweeping away towards Lyons through the most picturesque scenery, winding almost entirely between rocks and mountains, vineyards, châteaux, and pretty cottages embowered among beautiful trees.

The court of the château was covered with the softest green turf, and its ancient garden was ever gay with flowers and sparkling fountains, while its apartments remained, and yet remain, unaltered since it had been the favourite abode of Diana de Poitiers, whose drinking cup is yet there, made of that famous Venetian glass which was supposed to possess the rare property of breaking into a hundred pieces if any poisonous liquid was poured into it.

Hand in hand Achille and Thibaud wandered through the great rooms, the latter clinging to the former at times, in childish awe of grim Richebours of past times, who looked down on them both from their frames, out of helmets or over huge ruffs; at the rare armour, the beautiful enamels, the antique cabinets and mirrors, for the furniture was mostly in the gorgeous taste of the days of Louis Quatorze.

The imagination of Achille re-peopled the now silent rooms with witty courtiers, splendid French chevaliers, wearing easily as a glove the armour that now hung disused on the walls, and tilting at each other or at the ring in the grassy court below; for the château, though inhabited, remained unmodernised, and had been in more recent times the resort of some of the most gifted men in Europe, and had its memories of Bolingbroke when in exile, of Voltaire and Rousseau.

As Achille grew older it impressed him with a species of melancholy, as his busy fancy lingered over the princely, the bright, the gifted, the brave and the beautiful, who had been gathered to the silent tomb, and whose chief representative now was the silent, moody, and morose old man whose heir he was to be ; for there were not wanting those among the domestics who sought to impress that important fact upon his mind.

It was a glorious inheritance—one to be proud of—and though Achille shrunk from the contemplation of the actual time when his dark and gloomy uncle would pass away, he could not help picturing a future to himself and Thibaud more splendid, and certainly more joyous, than the present ; and when he might bring to Richebourg—but from where he knew not then—a bride as beautiful as any whose portraits were empanelled there.

When Achille was eighteen and Thibaud but ten years old, the brothers were separated, and the former was sent to travel, in care of a tutor, whose orders were that he should leave nothing undone to perfect his education.

‘Thus, Monsieur Achille,’ said that personage, a poor young abbé, ‘I shall leave you, I hope, able to take with due dignity the place of your forefathers.’

But little Thibaud looked forward with dismay to being left in that huge château without a companion, and clung, weeping like a girl, to the neck of Achille, when he bade him adieu, and the carriage bore him away to Lyons.

Music had ever been a passion with Achille, and at Berlin, Vienna, and elsewhere he gave himself up to the study of the art with enthusiasm ; nightly he frequented the opera, and relinquished the classics and everything else, to the great dismay of his tutor, spending the whole of his time at the piano, or, to the annoyance of all about him, in the study of the cornet.

He could little then foresee the use to which he was yet to put these studies to which he gave his whole soul, till M. l’Abbé began to fear some such terrible fiasco as the heir of the Marquis de Richebourg taking to music as a profession, and perhaps throwing himself at the feet of some artful *prima donna*.

So passed the days pleasantly enough, till a black-edged

letter arrived at Vienna. It came from a notary in Lyons, and announced the death of his uncle, who had been found dead at the writing-table in his library, with his head bent over an open volume. The notary further urged that he should return at once, and congratulated him as the fifteenth Marquis of Richebourg.

These sudden tidings shocked the young idler greatly, of course. No bond of regard existed between him and the dead man, certainly ; yet his face and figure came somewhat upbraidingly to memory, and in the generosity of his nature Achille began to marvel and speculate whether the coldness of the late Marquis was not due to some unconscious shortcoming on his own part ; but then he was equally cold and repellent to the fair-haired and sweetly dispositioned little Thibaud, who was loved by all.

However, a greater shock awaited him when he passed through Lyons and reached the grand old château in the Rhone, to find that there was another Marquis de Richebourg in possession ; that his uncle had been secretly married to a woman on his own estate, and their son was now the legal undisputed heir to everything.

‘No will was left, monsieur,’ said the notary, ‘so you and Monsieur Thibaud are totally unprovided for ; but I have no doubt that through the generosity of Monsieur le Marquis——’

‘Enough of this, M. le Notaire,’ said Achille, with intense bitterness of soul ; ‘my late uncle has cruelly deceived me, but I shall not take the value of a demi-franc from him who has supplanted me—this Marquis, the son of a mere *blanchisseuse* of La Croix Rousse !’

‘Take heart, my friend,’ said the notary, pitying Achille, who looked pale as death, and whose eyes had in them a dangerous gleam ; ‘you are young, and in some profession——’

‘I have been taught none, and am too much embittered in soul to learn one,’ said Achille, whose heart was swelling with natural resentment ; ‘and but for little Thibaud, I should become a soldier, like my father before me.’

‘M. le Marquis comes hither to reside permanently to-morrow,’ said the notary, gently, ‘and if you, Monsieur Achille, will but meet him——’

'May I perish where I stand if I do! *Sacre Dieu*, M. le Notaire, you know not the temper of him you are speaking to!' cried Achille with fury, as he took the hand of his startled and terrified brother, and turned his back for ever upon the stately abode that is moated by the Rhone, feeling, with justice, that it would be altogether an intolerable thing to live there, even if invited, which he was *not*, a dependent upon this most unexpected kinsman—the uneducated son of a peasant-woman—a dependent in the place where all had been wont to pay him homage and respect as its future lord and master.

He threw aside in scorn the mourning he had assumed for the late Marquis, and taking with him Thibaud, a weak, delicate, and ailing boy, whose system had never fairly recovered an illness contracted in Algeria, he obtained a humble lodging in Lyons, and strove to maintain himself and his brother by teaching music.

Of the last money he had received but a few five-franc pieces remained, and when he looked at Thibaud's pallid cheek and feverishly bright eyes, he thought, with terror, if want should come upon them ere he found pupils; and ere three days had passed in their dull and gloomy lodging, he began to pine for the beautiful view from the windows of Richebourg, the green wooded mountains, and the swift blue Rhone; for the interior of Lyons—however grand when viewed from a distance—is merely great stacks of quaint and lofty houses, with narrow and repulsive lanes between them.

While seeking for pupils, he thought of the poor abbé's warnings and fears concerning his musical propensities, and more than once he lingered before the theatre in the Place des Célestins, and that behind the Hôtel de Ville, wondering whether he might not turn his accomplishments on the cornet to account.

'Be of good courage, *mon ami*,' said the friendly notary, whom he met as he was returning despondently homeward. 'I have got a pupil for you—a young man who is as crazed concerning music as yourself.'

'Thanks, M. le Notaire,' exclaimed Achille; 'and this pupil——'

'Is the only son of M. Tristan de Pompignon.'

'The wealthy merchant in the place Bellecour?'

‘The same ; take with you my card, present yourself there to-morrow, and make your own terms.’

The thanks he gave the notary were genuine and earnest ; for he had but one thought at present—food, and, if possible, little luxuries for Thibaud ; yet he sighed amid his gratitude—it was so different to indulge in a passion for music as the heir of the Marquis de Richebourg, and to use it now as a means of existence.

‘Would that I could help you, dear Achille,’ said Thibaud, as the former was setting forth on the morrow ; ‘I feel so miserable to sit here idle, useless, and a burden on you.’

‘Do not talk thus, Thibaud, but try and get well and strong, dear fellow. I shall then give up this trade of teaching, and we shall both become soldiers ! What say to that, my Chasseur d’Afrique ?’

‘I shall never live to be a soldier,’ replied Thibaud, wistfully ; ‘but I shall go to *Notre Dame de Fourviers*, and pray for your success, Achille.’

With a sinking heart, for his position was a novel one, and his whole soul recoiled from it, Achille presented himself duly at the magnificent mansion in the Place Bellecour.

Young Tristan was the only son of M. de Pompignon ; he was a youth of fifteen, whose present fancy was music ; the terms were liberal beyond the expectations of Achille. Monsieur was polite, even kind, and hoped his patronage would lead to something more for the young music master, of whose story he had heard a rumour, which he could not quite understand ; but then Monsieur de Pompignon was very deaf.

His son was delighted with Achille, and the lessons of the first and second day passed over very pleasantly. On the third, the door of the music-room was opened suddenly, but softly, and a young lady entered.

‘My sister Hélène—Monsieur Richebourg,’ said the pupil.

She surveyed Achille for a moment very superciliously, and returned the profound bow he gave her with a response that was worse than no response at all. It was merely the slightest inclination of her haughty but certainly beautiful little head, as she was about to withdraw.

‘Stay a moment, Hélène,’ said her brother, ‘and hear how I am progressing.’

'I would rather be excused,' she replied curtly, and retired.

She was a brilliant blonde, in the full bloom of budding womanhood, but with all her beauty, which was rare, high, and delicate in its degree, Achille felt, in the novelty of his altered circumstances and humble position, irritated and ruffled more than he would have cared to confess. But he had many affronts, perhaps unintentionally, put upon him. In the drawing-room and elsewhere, visitors came and went, but the poor *maître de musique* was introduced to none!

Pride was the besetting sin of Mademoiselle de Pompignon; thus, when she had more than once passed Achille in the street (attended by an obsequious and gaudily liveried footman) without seeming to see him, and had twice sailed out of the music-room when he entered it, his heart became inflamed with resentment against her, and he began to loathe the daily task of attendance on her brother; and yet she was so beautiful, so graceful and attractive, that he would have given life itself to win a smile from her, for she seemed the realisation of the bride of his boyish day-dreams, that he had hoped to lead from the altar at Richebourg, and no fairer face than hers was pictured in the gallery there.

Thus, as resentment mingled with his admiration of her, he treated her with the most marked coldness; he never seemed to care to meet her eye, and, whenever occasion served, studiously ignored her existence.

She saw that he was handsome, accomplished, and had an air of distinction there was no denying: thus she in turn became piqued, and resolved to conquer him if she could, even though he, in her haughty eyes, was only a poor music master, and on this she was the more resolved after hearing a reply of Achille to her brother—a reply which he intended for her ears.

'I should like you to hear Héléne play; her performance is as sweet as her own face.'

Achille made no response.

'You admire it, don't you, M. Achille?' persisted the boy.

'The coldness of its expression chills me; pardon, M. Tristan, but a face without a smile could never charm me.'

Next day, on entering the music-room, Héléne, who had never done more than give the merest bow to Achille, and

then only when in the house, presented her hand to him with a bright smile. To the latter he made no response, and though his heart beat lightly, he barely touched the lovely little hand she offered.

From that day a change came over her. She condescended to make occasionally a few remarks, and her proud eyes seemed to soften when they met, and even seemed to seek the gaze of Achille. She hovered about her brother, as if interested in his performance and progression ; occasionally she ran her fingers coquettishly over the keys, touching those of Achille and sending a thrill to his heart, where all resentment had died away, and engaged in unmistakable *willades* with the most charming eyes in the world.

Achille was perplexed ; he now loved her, and longed to press her to his heart—to kiss but her hand ; yet no expression of eye and no inflexion of voice betrayed him, or lured him, as yet, from the part he had resolved to act.

Hélène, though proud, was by nature a coquette, and as she looked at Achille, her eyes, wont always to command admiration, met only a handsome face that regarded her changed manner with an apparently half-interested, half-scrutinising, and wholly indifferent expression, as the owner thereof, after a low bow, but without a smile, always turned to his pupil.

Hélène would then colour with secret anger, and felt instinctively a spirit of defiance grow within her ; but little could she conceive that the young man's heart was beating wildly with joy at the very sense of her presence !

'Who is this so-called Richebourg,' she thought, 'who dares to treat me, the daughter of the richest merchant in Lyons, thus ?'

Moreover, there was always a perfect calmness in his voice that led the imperious little beauty almost to hate him.

'I shall crush him yet !' thought she.

So between these two this strange kind of game at cross-purposes went on for many days, Achille, the while, fast learning to love the girl with all his heart and soul—most hopeless though his love might be—and she, though not unwilling that he should adore her very shadow, like a

coquette as she was, contriving to remain perfectly heart-whole herself.

At last there came a day, one of those days which people seldom forget, when, by the lingering of her hand in his, and the downcast expression of her quivering eyelids, he read, as he fancied, an admission of the mutual love with which he had at all hazards inspired her.

‘I am sure of her now,’ thought he, ‘and shall put her to the test ; but what will people say of me for betraying her father’s confidence and trust?’

‘Accept this from me, mademoiselle,’ said he next day, placing in her hand a beautiful bouquet composed of white azaleas, tea rose-buds, and the tenderest fern, with a lovely scarlet camellia and sprig of pink and white heath in the centre.

‘Oh, thank you, Monsieur Achille—it is charming!’ she exclaimed, while her eyes sparkled, and with a triumphant smile she buried her proud sweet face in the fragrant mass of flowers.

On the morrow she wore in the bosom of her dress the scarlet camellia with the sprig of pink and white heath, and the heart of the donor leaped within him at the sight.

‘Your pink and white heath is still fresh and beautiful, Monsieur Achille,’ said she, looking coquettishly down at her bosom.

‘You know what it means,’ said he tremulously.

‘Means—how?’

‘In the language of flowers?’

‘I know what pale heath means.’

‘That “I love you.”’

‘But the pink implies doubt, does it not, Monsieur Achille?’

‘Not so far as I am concerned, mademoiselle,’ said he, in a voice still more tremulous.

She eyed him with a mingled expression of face, in which shyness, coyness, and triumph might be read.

‘Pardon me—Hélène,’ said he, with clasped hands.

‘For what?’

‘What I am about to say—that I love you—and you—you love me, do you not?’ he urged, softly taking her hands in his, while his heart thrilled within him.

‘Do not ask me,’ she exclaimed, freeing herself from his clasp with a sharp wrench that gave him a real pang of pain ; ‘this is too much,’ she added, with crimsoned cheeks, ‘I shall leave you with your pupil—here comes Tristan.’

Thus she left him in doubt and wretchedness, with the chilling fear that he had miscalculated the real state of her heart, and had transgressed too far, or too abruptly. He passed the day as one in a dream—in a long nightmare ; but ‘for a woman to know that a man loves her, even if she does not love that man, is a dangerous thing,’ says some one.

Hélène, however, did not avoid him on the morrow ; but entered the music-room as usual, and encouraged by this, he ventured to take her hand and say :

‘You will forgive the words, the presumption, the madness of yesterday !’

‘I have nothing to forgive, monsieur,’ said she, with her long eyelashes drooping.

‘Then you pardon me, dearest Hélène ?’

‘Oh, Achille !’ she sighed, and in another moment his arm went round her, and her bright face was nestling in his neck.

‘You love me, Hélène !’ said he, in a low and impassioned voice, while his pulses throbbed like lightning ; while time seemed to stand still, and the room to whirl round them.

Her voice responded in the faintest whisper, but it gave no denial.

‘Hush—don’t—Tristan is coming !’ she exclaimed hurriedly, and withdrew. He loved her—she had conquered at last.

We fear the lessons of that day were sadly blundered indeed.

After a day or two of tumultuous joy on the part of Achille Richebourg—joy that was, nevertheless, clouded by a fear of their separation by the sudden interference of her father, M. de Pompignon, he resolved to ask her to betroth herself to him, even only for a time—a promise to be redeemed if Fate smiled on him, or his horrible cousin, the son of the *blanchisseuse* at La Croix Rousse, died, or her family gave their consent, to gain which he believed the rank of his own might favour him ; and this promise he resolved they should invest with some solemnity by mutually exchanging before the altar

of the nearest church, where no eyes but those of heaven should see them.

Full of the romance of this idea, he came one morning earlier than usual, ere young Tristan was in his place, and urged her to meet him, in the tenderest voice and manner he could assume ; but it was all as his heart felt, and he pressed her hand between his own.

‘Meet me, dearest Hélène, in the church of *Notre Dame de Fourviers* to-morrow.’

‘Why, Achille?’

‘I will tell you when we are there.’

‘At what hour?’ she asked, in her low rich voice.

‘Noon.’

‘That is impossible.’

‘Why, dearest Hélène?’

‘Because,’ said she, with a mocking burst of cruel laughter, ‘I am to be married there at that very hour to-morrow.’

‘Married! What jest is this, Hélène?’

But she only uttered a little hysterical cry of alarm, and fairly fled from the room, as M. de Pompignon suddenly appeared with a very dark expression of face indeed.

‘She does not jest, Monsieur Richebourg,’ said he, haughtily and sternly, ‘though I am utterly at a loss to understand this scene. Any way, we shall require your services no more ; there are the napoleons I owe you—go!—and as for Mademoiselle de Pompignon, she is to be married to-morrow to Colonel Clermont. Her engagement and espousal have long been a family affair. I need say no more, especially to you!’

And with incredible hauteur he threw open the door of the room, as pitiless as his daughter was in her pride, her coquetry and triumph.

‘And this insult is to me,’ exclaimed Achille ; ‘to me, who but a few months ago believed myself Marquis de Richebourg!’

How Achille got over the next few weeks he scarcely knew ; but he looked for no more pupils, and found occupation enough in attending to the wants, and, as they proved, to the last hours, of his little brother Thibaud, whose illness, a species of wasting away, he had partly failed to remark, so

absorbed had he been of late with his passion for Hélène ; and when the poor boy died in his arms, much of remorse mingled with his hate of the girl who had so befooled him.

He had now no tie on earth to bind him to France, and a few months after the death of Thibaud saw him a soldier in the 3rd Zouaves, fighting under the gallant Breton, François Canrobert, against the Arab tribes of the Bouaoun, in the Djerma Pass and elsewhere.

He had seen terrible things done on service there ; Arab families smoked to death in caverns, and had to watch the slow death of Zouaves condemned to *le cog Gaulois* ; the torture of being suspended by the wrist from a tree with the toe of one foot resting on a cannon ball, and the exposure of the eyes and face to a scorching sun.

He was one of those who escaped in the dreadful snow-storm on the heights of Sakhamondi, when so many perished miserably on the march amid the deep and horrible ravines, and he was afterwards one of those who, under a blazing and fierce African noon, stormed the steep and sun-baked rocks of Narah, when the dark Kabyles, who hewed off, without mercy, the heads of all who fell into their power, manned the heights with their long matchlocks, and in places inaccessible apparently as the eyries of the eagles, held in check the flower of Canrobert's army for seven hours, nor might they have given way even then, but for the notes of an Arab trumpet that was heard, as darkness fell, sounding the *retreat* that was familiar to the enemy.

Then they gave way on all hands ; the dreadful heights were carried, after three columns of infantry had failed before them, but it was not until the pursuit was over, amid a thunderstorm in which the din of the French flying artillery seemed to mingle in blasphemous rivalry with that of the firmament, that it became known that he who sounded the retreat was Achille Richebourg, of the 3rd Zouaves ; and in his modesty of spirit it would never have been known but for the clamour made by his comrade, Renée, about the circumstance.

All said he deserved the Cross of the Legion ; but he was only to receive a medal, in common with the rest of the hill-stormers who had distinguished themselves, and this they

were to receive from the fair hands of a lady—the wife of the General commanding in the city of Algiers.

The day of this ceremony was a glorious one, when the troops in thousands, bronzed well-nigh to negro blackness by Algerian service, were massed in columns at the foot of the hill on which the city stands—the Spahis in madder-coloured burnous and white turbans, their long tasselled lances glittering in the cloudless sun ; the dashing Chasseurs d'Afrique in blue dolmans ; the Zouaves in their well-known costume, and infantry of the line, dark and sombre, in long blue coats, buttoned back. In the rear of all these masses, quivering apparently in the sunshine, rose the square towers, the mosques, and minarets, above each other, like flights of white steps from the blue ocean to the summit of the hill, four hundred feet in height—Algiers, for ages the city of the pirates.

Each soldier was summoned in turn to receive his medal, under the tricolour, amid a brilliant staff, where stood the donor, Madame la Générale, said to be a woman of very great beauty. As that of Achilles was pinned upon the breast of his faded, frayed, and blood-bespattered blue jacket by two snowy little hands, he looked in her face, and saw the dark violet eyes, the bright golden hair, the lips fresh as a rosebud, and the alluring smile of—Hélène.

Embrowned by service in scorching Africa, his neck bare, his eyes fierce and keen as those of a hawk, from facing daily peril, she did not at first recognise the young man she had so cruelly deceived ; nor did she become certain of his existence till she inquired his name, and then her interest in him ceased, for she was as heartless as she was beautiful.

‘And you saw her no more?’ said Julian, as the Zouave paused in his story.

‘Never more but once,’ he replied, as a dark shade fell on his face. ‘Near those same luckless heights of Narah, our staff, when reconnoitring, had been suddenly attacked in time of truce by a horde of furious Kabyles. It took place about nightfall, and in the hasty charge to break through them, and the hot, mad gallop rearward, Clermont lost his wife.

‘Some of the 3rd were ordered to cover this retreat in skirmishing order, closing ever and anon in rallying squares,

when attacked ; and in a place where the wild cactus and the orange-trees grew thick, Rénée and I found Héléne, thrown from her horse, and dying, with a matchlock bullet in her beautiful breast.

‘I put my canteen to her pale lips, gently as a mother might do it to that of her ailing baby ! I strove to make her swallow a little of the fetid water—fetid after that long day’s hot march—which it contained ; too late—too late ! She was beyond human aid.

‘The pale moonbeams fell upon her dying and sharpened features. Hate and jealousy that roused pride and wounded self-esteem were all gone from me now, and only a great and holy pity remained. Héléne—Héléne ! she lay between death and me ! There was a fierce but very forlorn triumph in having her all to myself. She, that had aroused my first love, and played with that love in her heedless vanity. Did she know me ? Surely, for she murmured my name, and I wept as I heard it—heard it on the once lovely lips that scorned me in the past time ; and she fell, to all appearance, asleep, with her head on my shoulder. Alas ! it was the last sleep that must come, inexorably, to us all ! And so, *mon camarade*, it came to pass that by the fortune of war, and the turn of events, the fair Héléne died that terrible death in the African wilderness—died in my arms—and then we buried her, scooping her uncouth grave with our sword-bayonets. We piled brambles over it, as a protection against wild animals ; we said beside it the prayers our mothers had taught us when we were young (though, *ma foi !* the army didn’t pray much in Africa) ; and with heavy hearts—mine was as a heart of lead—followed in all haste our comrades.’

Achille Richebourg was too volatile by nature to be long depressed by the story of his unfortunate love affair, which the handkerchief of Amy had been the means of evoking ; thus, when on the following day he took his departure, limping sorely with his wound, to rejoin his comrades on the right flank of the French military force, he was singing Beranger’s song of the ‘Two Grenadiers,’ with its refrain :—

‘Vieux grenadier suivant un vieux soldat,
Vieux grenadier suivant un vieux soldat !’ etc. etc.

And he waved his turban in farewell to Julian, as he dis-

appeared between the French camp and Lord Raglan's headquarters.

When again they met it was on a day when many were doomed to part to meet no more, in this world, at all events.

CHAPTER XLV.

'THE SOLDIERS' BATTLE.'

THE story of Achille Richebourg, had, upon Julian, the effect of making him repine less at his own obscure fate ; in misfortune he was not quite alone, even in the small world of the Crimea.

The Frenchman had been done out of his inheritance and hereditary title by a species of trick (but a perfectly legal one), even as he and Gerard had been cheated of their birthright. Achille had lost his grand château upon the Rhone, even as Julian had lost, prospectively, that which would have come to him in due time, stately and baronial Deloraine ; and he had been deluded by the girl he loved, and whom he had learned to hate, and then to pity in the end.

Now both were private soldiers, with little to hope for but death ; their stories were, Julian thought, a little identical, and we all know how 'a fellow-feeling makes us wondrous kind.'

'I never heard a love tale so peculiar,' thought he ; but he knew nothing of Salome, and the love story of Gerard, which mystery rendered stranger still.

November was creeping on now, and daily the dull routine of death, if one may use the term, was in progress before Sebastopol, where our soldiers were actually becoming careless of shot and shell, so used were they to the sound of them whistling about and falling or exploding near them ; for night and day the Russians fired on our working parties with their heaviest ordnance.

Thus the trenches were pushed more briskly by night than by day. Those of the British were nearly five miles in extent, full of zig-zags, batteries, and parallels by which all the surrounding ground was broken up, and the night duty there was harassing in the extreme, and many men perished amid the mud and snow when the winter season came. But the

soldiers always spoke hopefully and cheerfully of taking Sebastopol ere the snow fell, of burning the city and ships, of blowing up the forts and taking prisoners a vast garrison, that was being perpetually replaced by *fresh* troops ; but many a weary month of cold, disease, and ghastly havoc were to pass away ere the bells of the doomed city were to ring their last peal.

After enduring a whole day in the trenches, a day when, what with whirling eddies of smoke, splinters of stones, shells, and gabions, the crashing of shot, thirst, hunger, and toil, he could scarcely stand, Julian who had been with a working party of the Guards, on being dismissed, approached Sir Harry Drake, when the latter was just about to enter his hut, and, according the usual salute, said, with a little air of confusion or doubt, for his heart was still in some respects a proud one : ‘Excuse me, Sir Harry, I have my earnest thanks to give you—with something more.’

‘For what have you to thank me, my man?’ asked the young baronet, with a tone of impatience, to which the toil and worry of the past day perhaps contributed. ‘Speak quickly,’ he added, as he unstrapped his field glass, sword and revolver, and tossed them to his servant.

‘Permit me to return those five shillings you lent me ; I only got the money this morning from the pay-sergeant.’

Blank amazement for a moment was expressed in the face of Sir Harry, and then anger, as Julian added, ‘You kindly lent them to me at Balaclava.’

‘Lent them ! I *gave* them to you, fellow—what the devil do you mean?’ he exclaimed.

‘Please not to adopt this tone to me, Sir Harry,’ said Julian patiently. ‘I took them as a loan to get some wine for a wounded Zouave.’

‘I cannot accept them,’ said the officer in a milder tone, but with a bearing of considerable hauteur.

‘Then I shall either leave them here on the grass or give them to your servant, if you will permit me.’

‘You shall do neither, and by heaven, if——’ began Sir Harry hotly, but changing his tone, he said, ‘You are one of the oddest fellows I ever met. Here—give me the money—thanks.’

He thrust the cash into his purse with some irritation of manner, for in connection with Julian he felt an undefinable sense of annoyance. In all this there only seemed to him an affectation of equality repugnant to discipline and their relative positions. Yet somehow in Julian's eyes, air, and bearing there was something that impressed him with a certain sense of respect.

'Have you anything more to say?' he asked the latter, as he lingered.

'Only this : you conferred a favour, a kindness, on me, Sir Harry, in lending me that little sum, which I can never have it in my power to confer on you—our lines in life are so far apart.'

'I should think so,' was the somewhat haughty reply.

Julian said this gravely and modestly, and saluting Sir Harry (who barely accorded a response) turned away ; but both were mistaken ; neither could foresee what a few hours were to bring forth, or for how much the baronet and lieutenant-colonel (for the Guards had, then, this privileged rank) was to be indebted to the private soldier. With an intense sense of humiliation at the general result of this interview, though aware that he was bound in honour to return the trifle lent him, poor Julian flung himself, supperless—he had given his rations to the hungry children of a slain comrade—after a day of toil and peril, on his straw pallet, and strove to sleep ; and in truth, Sir Harry Drake and his cousin, Bertie Slingsby, who shared one hut, were not in a much better predicament, and this was the sort of life for which these gay young Guardsmen had relinquished London with all its glories, lawn-parties, dinners, and balls, the Row, the Zoo, Collar-days, and drawing-rooms, hunting, and shooting—even the most moderate comforts of civilised existence. This was on the Saturday evening that preceded a tremendous attack upon the besiegers. Into Sebastopol, upon the open or uninvested side, 50,000 additional troops from Odessa had been poured in the first days of November, and to General Ostensacken, who commanded them, Siberia and degradation were threatened by the Emperor Nicholas if the Allies—but chiefly 'the Island curs'—were not destroyed, and the siege raised. All the saints of 'Holy Russia' were invoked, and,

from the pulpits of Sebastopol, to those who fell, the crowns of martyrdom were promised; to those who survived and conquered, the vast spoil, the treasures of Hindostan, which were alleged to be stored up in the camp of the British, who were described as veritable monsters, who committed upon all who fell into their hands cruelties conceivable only to the imagination of such bloodthirsty and abominable heretics, whose utter extermination would be pleasing alike in the eyes of God and of the Emperor. Vast quantities of potent raki were served out to all the troops, the further to flush their zeal, inflame their passions, and deaden all sense of danger; and in this spirit, cautiously and noiselessly—the tramp of their footsteps muffled by the clangour of all the bells of the churches, among them the great bell that now tolls the hours in the camp of Aldershot, and their motions and numbers concealed by a thick mist—the mighty sortie of 50,000 men stole out of Sebastopol, and guided, it was supposed, by spies, descended into the deep ravines near the British right flank, the weakest point of the Allies' position.

Moving onward swiftly and silently, this mighty mass, with its accompanying service of artillery, came upon the front as well as the flank of the British, some 12,000 of whom were all the force that was there to oppose it. Out of the mist and drizzling rain came the dark masses with their red flashing musketry, about three in the morning, falling in a most unexpected quarter on our slender pickets, which were at once driven in by an overwhelming force and their withering fire. Knapsacks, haversacks, and every encumbrance were cast aside, and though many of our muskets, wetted by exposure overnight, failed to explode, the fire became general on both sides, rolling away in sputtering lines of sudden light towards the valley of the caverns, as the whole army rushed to arms, warned of a terrible conflict, and the bloody day of Inkermann, the 5th of November, stole darkly and cloudily in. With the general narration of that eventful field we shall not concern ourselves, save so far as our story may require. When the alarm sounded in the dark, and the brigade of Guards sprang to their arms, two men in this little town of tents and huts thought of the same girl, who then was so far away—of bright little Amy Kerr. Julian's memory

flashed home to her as the only friend he had on earth beside his brother—yet neither might know his fate if he fell ; and Sir Harry Drake, who loved her with his whole heart, had just penned to her a half-despairing epistle, which he now feared might be his last. As the drums beat to arms, and the fire of the pickets was heard in the distance, he gave a farewell glance in the dim light at a packet (on which lay the splinter of a shell, improvised as a letter-weight) which he kept perpetually sealed, and addressed to Amy Kerr, prepared for any casualty. How well he knew the contents of it, even to a rose-leaf. For there were flowers, now scentless, brown, and dead, that spoke of pleasant days of hope and joy spent at Kew and Richmond, and of rides and rambles in shady English summer lanes ; of buds begged from bouquets amid the crush of Belgravian ball-rooms ; petty yet glorified treasures—among them actually a lock of Amy's bright brown hair, cut off in play by Kate ; and with them a letter—a long, long one—telling her of a love that would never change, and full of hope and trust in a blessed God, and the happiness of days to come. He looked at it as the long roll died away on the drum, and the din of the firing and of many voices grew louder ; he thought over all this once again, put on his bearskin and sword, and went forth as the grim morning of Inkermann dawned in the cold, grey lowering sky, whose darkening many would never see. His cousin, Bertie Slingsby, practically or by force of habit, deposited a few postage stamps beside a letter that *he*, too, had written, but now had not the time to close—a letter to his mother, then asleep in some Belgravian mansion, all unconscious of the immediate peril that threatened him, her only son ; and, drawing his sword, rushed to join his company, high in heart and spirit. Bertie had firm, bold, dark grey eyes, a splendid moustache, and the gay careless air of a handsome young fellow, a drawing-room pet, of the Household Brigade, whom women and the world had done their best to spoil, and yet had failed to do so.

'And now to slate these Russian beggars again, dear Harry !' he exclaimed, as the Coldstreams formed upon the right of the Scots Fusiliers, and the noble brigade was formed by battalions ; but unfortunately for themselves, on this

morning all, or nearly all, the officers of the Guards came forth in *scarlet*, with their epaulettes on, while their men were clad in their dark grey overcoats, and such was the case in many regiments of the line.

By this time the pickets, fighting resolutely, had retreated to a small redoubt which had not been armed, though intended for two guns ; thus the defence of the ravine, which offered such an easy access to our camp, had been neglected. The danger of this had not been unforeseen by Sir De Lacy Evans ; but before aught could be done to secure the pass, so slender was our force, and so vast the ground they had to cover, the Russians were through it, and had they been successful, it is much to be feared that the Crimean War had ended then, and that the Allies must have embarked or surrendered. Belching forth death and mutilation with every red flash that streaked the blended mist and smoke, the Russian artillery now opened fire from the slopes of those heights to which they had stolen unseen, while all the batteries in the town at the same moment opened a terrific cannonade on the camp, tearing the tents to rags, knocking the huts to pieces, and making a dreadful havoc among our troops, as they formed and advanced into action. From the embankment of the little redoubt, the men of the 55th Regiment poured a steady fire upon the advancing enemy, till a column of the latter, outnumbering them by forty to one, captured it at a rush, drove them back, and mercilessly slew every wounded man they found, either by stabbing him with bayonet or dashing out his brains by the butt-end of the musket ; and but for the succour afforded by the 41st Welsh and the 49th Hertfordshire, which now came rushing and cheering into action, not a man of the brave 55th could have escaped the human tide of drunk and maddened Muscovites that surged around them. Forming line with splendid rapidity as they came on, these two regiments poured in a steady volley with their Minie rifles, and, heedless of the fact that the Russians before them were massed in ponderous columns, looking dark and sombre with their black glazed caps and long *capotes*, they made one desperate and headlong charge with their levelled bayonets, and plunging into the first horde, hurled it in confusion and tumult back upon the rear in a

hand to hand and muzzle to muzzle *mêlée*. This advantage was scarcely won ere the terrible fire of the cannon hurled both regiments back, while the din of battle grew every moment louder, deeper, and wilder, in the echoing valley, the rocks and caverns of which tossed the sounds from side to side, and the obscurity of which was such that our troops, when pressing onward to the attack, through mist and smoke, among stunted trees and tall brushwood, had only the red flashes of the musketry to direct them ; thus many corps did not see the enemy till close upon their bayonets. Lord Raglan, the generals of division, and brigadiers were all on horseback now ; day was fairly in, and the whole army was in motion. General Strangeways brought up a sufficient force of our artillery to silence even the Russian guns, but the crest of the hill was so shrouded in smoke, and encumbered by thick gorse, that the guns were unlimbered and wheeled round with great difficulty.

In one part of this most confused field of battle, the smoke and mist suddenly rose like a curtain, and a vast Russian column appeared within ten yards or less of the muzzles of a brigade of our guns under Major Townsend. As he was quite unsupported, he gave the order to retire, but ere it could be obeyed the flat-caps were upon him with the bayonet. Yet out of his six guns only one was taken, though a shell burst in the midst of them and dashed his head to pieces. Elsewhere, brave old General Strangeways, who had his legs smashed by a cannon-shot, was bleeding to death on a stretcher. By this time, in another quarter the brigade of Guards was heavily pressed by the enemy, who were crouching in thousands among some dense brushwood, out of which their musketry came in one incessant blaze of fire, mowing down men on every hand, till the 20th (whilom Kingsley's regiment) came on with its 'Minden yell,' together with the 47th or Lancashire, both of which had failed in another effort to keep, after they had retaken, the wretched redoubt, the whole ground about which was now literally heaped with dead, as again the Russians slaughtered every wounded man when the two slender battalions fell back. Of the noble 20th some 200 men had just come in from the trenches, after twenty-four hours of toil and exposure to the rain and wind ; but the

whole, with the brigade of Guards, led by the Duke of Cambridge, rushed with fury into the redoubt, and, charging over piles of dead and dying, retook it at the point of the bayonet, and from that moment it would have been retained by a handful of the Coldstreams against more than 6,000 Russians, but they were surrounded in it and literally cut off. Three times, with hoarse and wild hurrahs and strangely savage cries, the dark columns of flat-capped and grey-coated Russians hurled all their fury against the redoubt, the ground within which was filled with sodden corpses and slippery with blood and brains ; and three times the Guardsmen hurled them back with slaughter ; but other troops, all more or less maddened with raki, came pouring out of Sebastopol, and protracted the conflict everywhere.

The handful of Coldstreams, isolated now, fought back to back till their ammunition was expended, and then they resorted to hurling stones. It was then that two or three officers, of whom Sir Harry Drake was one, formed the brave little band in line, and, leading them in a bayonet charge, burst headlong through the Russian lines, which parted like the waves of the sea before them, and they rejoined the Household Brigade, but not until more than 1,000 of the brutal enemy had bit the dust beneath their steel.

Though men were falling fast on every side, before and behind him, 'and human lives were lavished everywhere,' in Julian's breast that kind of tension of the heart young soldiers feel when first under fire had passed away ; he felt only the fierce desire to close in and grapple with the enemy, to overbear and tread him under foot ; and he continued to load and fire with mechanical rapidity till his arms ached.

Amid the eddying smoke he saw Colonel Kingsmuir riding at full and furious speed, with some orders from Lord Raglan. He had lost his cocked hat, and his thin white hair was streaming behind him. Julian gave one wistful glance after the kind old Colonel, whom he had known so well in the past time, that literally seemed to have been ages ago.

Well, thank God, he had saved his life on that terrible night in the advanced trenches, a return in some sort for his kindness on many an occasion ; but, chief of all, at that time

when the tame otter was slain, and he saved him--Julian--from perhaps smiting down his own father !

His fast receding figure vanished amid the smoke on the errand he might not be fated to accomplish. It was to bring on the 4th Division to the relief of the Guards. Its commander was the brave Scottish veteran, Sir George Cathcart, who had served on the fields of Lutzen, Leipzig, and Waterloo, and, sword in hand, he led the division to the charge against a column of 9,000 Russians. In that charge he fell, shot through the heart, and, together with his aide-de-camp, who sought to succour him, or protect his body, was literally cut to pieces.

Slowly now, and disputing every inch of the ground, our troops began to fall back upon their lines. 'Close in, men ; close in !' was the incessant cry of the officers, as gaps occurred in the fast thinning ranks, for the 'loose formation' of to-day was then unknown, and Britons believed in the magic touch of the elbow, and being shoulder to shoulder. With all their high heroic valour it was impossible that a conflict so unequal could be maintained. Amid their grey-coated ranks the brilliant full uniforms and white shoulder-belts of our officers rendered them fatal marks for the Russian riflemen, who, as they pressed onward, believing that all would soon be over with the 'Island curs,' were everywhere seen bayoneting or braining the wounded.

The Duke of Cambridge was once completely surrounded, and would have been captured but for a few of the 7th Hussars, and by eleven in the forenoon the enemy were close to the tents of the 2nd Division !

Long ere this came to pass, Julian and two or three others of his regiment, in the headlong confusion of a bayonet charge, lost themselves among the brushwood, and speedily found that they were in the Russian rear ! To advance was only to court death, as they were certain to be shot down, and not taken prisoners. Ere they could consult for a moment, there was an explosion of musketry, about forty yards distant. His comrades fell dead, and Julian found himself alone face to face with a Russian mounted officer and four soldiers of the Jakoutsk Regiment, who were going through the bushes and deliberately assassinating the wounded,

As Julian saw that only one of these men had his musket loaded—his right thumb being on the lock of his piece—he shot him dead just as he was about to kill an officer of the Guards, who was resting helplessly in a sitting position against a heap of stones.

On this the other three uttered a shout of fury, and came on with their bayonets fixed. Julian thought it was all over with him now, but it was not so. With an invocation of heaven on his lips, he hurled with all his strength his musket at the nearest one, so that the bayonet lodged fairly in his breast. At the other two he fired a revolver that had been lying near, and wounded both severely—one in the arm, and the other in the shoulder.

The officer, who was about thirty paces off, drew a pistol from his holster, and, taking a deliberate aim, fired at Julian, who felt himself struck in the breast, and reeled, believing himself shot.

‘God save me!’ he exclaimed, and put his hand to the place, but no blood was upon it. He believed the ball had penetrated, and fury, with the dread of death, gathered together in his soul. Then the officer, putting spurs to his horse, was about to cut him down, till he saw the revolver levelled at himself, on which he wheeled about and galloped into the mist, but not before Julian had again recognised in him the spy, Mouravieff!

Breathless, excited, and feeling a kind of sickness at the heart, as the result of this sudden and unequal combat, notwithstanding the innate fighting spirit of his Border race which blazed up within him, he was about to turn away with the intention of seeking the British lines, whatever the risk might be, for the roar and smoke of the battle (which was strictly confined to the Valley of Inkermann and the fatal redoubt so often taken and retaken) had now passed towards our camp, on which the foe was already too close; but ere he quitted the spot, the officer whom he had protected called to him by name, and on approaching he discovered the sufferer to be Sir Harry Drake, who had been struck almost senseless by a spent ball, which had hit him on the back part of the head, where the thickness of his bearskin cap had saved him from further injury.

But he was incapable of defending himself, and seemed stunned and literally dazed. Julian raised him up, and the officer clung breathlessly to his arm. Then the former perceiving a kind of hole, cavern, or fissure, he knew not which, opening in a projecting rock close by, he supported, or conducted, him into it, and in doing so he had to pass the Russian whom he had bayoneted, and who was just expiring amid a pool of his own blood, blowing balls of it and foam upward from his lips, and though such a horrid sight might have filled Julian with just horror and pity at another time, the field at Inkermann was not exactly the place for such sentiments, especially in one who imagined that he had just received a dangerous wound and might be bleeding internally.

For a moment, at that idea, a cold sweat came over him, with the strange sensation that all this must be happening, *not* to him, but to some one else ; and with it was a momentary dread fear in his heart, and a bounding of all his pulses.

On examination, he found, however, to his joy, that though his clothing had been pierced, the ball had gone no further. The pocket-book, which he carried in the breast of his uniform, had saved him from what might certainly have been a mortal wound.

'Stay with me, like a good fellow,' said Sir Harry, in a low, faint voice, 'and in a little time we can rejoin the brigade together—alone, I shall never reach it.'

'I shall not leave you, sir,' said Julian, as he handed his water-bottle to Sir Harry ; 'in fact, it would seem that our only safety consists in remaining where we are, and out of sight of all stragglers.'

'Those butcherly dogs have been showing no quarter to-day, and but for your opportune arrival I must have perished at their hands, as so many helpless creatures have done, in that truly infernal redoubt. As I lay helpless yonder, it seemed something miraculous, the way in which you polished off those four Russians and put the fifth scoundrel to flight.'

'But for this revolver, sir, there would have been another story to tell.'

'You and I should not have been here to tell it,' said Sir Harry. 'I shall never forget you, never, for I and mine owe you a debt of everlasting gratitude,' he added, grasping the

hand of Julian ; ‘but for the life of me—the life you have saved—I know not in what way to reward you.’

‘Hush,’ said Julian ; ‘I hear voices and other sounds.’

The latter proved to be the rumble of ill-greased wheels and the clatter of artillery, spongers, and rammers, as four Russian pieces of heavy cannon, painted in that pea-green colour which the capture of so many of them rendered familiar to our troops in the Crimea, came furiously through the dense brushwood, with their foam-flecked horses at a gallop, and were wheeled round and unlimbered, with their muzzles pointed to what was *then* the Russian rear, while the escort halted and proceeded to reload their carbines and pistols.

‘I fear we have lost the day,’ said Sir Harry, in a low voice, though the roar of battle in the valley was deepening again.

‘It does not look like it, if they are beginning to retire their guns, as this movement would seem to import.’

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE CAVERN.

AGAIN and again Sir Harry Drake repeated his thanks to Julian, and expressed gratitude for the timely succour he gave ; and the latter could but urge that he had done no more than his duty, and that he was certain Sir Harry would have done as much for him. Yet, while lurking there, he could not help contrasting the actual value, and the probable future, of the two lives that had been so nearly hanging in the balance.

Young, wealthy, and titled, Sir Harry had so much to make life valuable. Julian was young, too ; but his life was one of obscurity now, and even hope seemed to have gone out of it ; while the fierce excitement of the present seemed an opiate, a species of artificial panacea for the past. ‘Every man who has suffered keenly in life,’ says a writer, ‘must have felt that there is in the human organisation an instinctive re-action and resistance against sorrow—a natural tendency to take advantage of any lull in the storm, and a disposition to deceive ourselves into the belief that we are

forgetting for the time that which every effort proves we too bitterly remember.'

It added to the gratitude of Sir Harry the knowledge that, but for Julian's gallant heart and ready hand, the farewell letter and packet which had been left in his tent would, by the next mail from Balaclava, have been speeding to *her* to whom they were addressed.

The place in which he had found shelter, or concealment, was one of the many caverns and cells cut out of the solid rock by the Greek monks in past ages, and for which the valley of Inkermann has frequently been named the City of Caverns. Many of these are connected with each other by stairs and galleries, and in many of them have been found stone sarcophagi.

In long perspective, beyond the entrance of the one in which Julian and Sir Harry were lurking, could be seen now, as the morning sun exhaled the silvery mist, the picturesque and beautiful valley through which the Tchernaya, after being spanned by a picturesque old bridge, winds amid the most luxuriant verdure, and between high white cliffs that are literally honeycombed by cells and caverns, till it falls into the harbour of Sebastopol.

But to look forth was full of peril, for the Russian gunners were prowling among their own wounded and the British dead searching for plunder. They frequently came close to the cavern's mouth, and had any of them conceived the idea of searching there, the lurkers would have been lost, though Julian had now another musket, to replace the one he had hurled, with its fixed bayonet, at the Russian; and thrice he cocked it, and placed himself resolutely before Sir Harry, resolved to sell the lives of both as dearly as possible if the Muscovites approached their hiding place.

They wore a kind of Tartar cap of black fur; their coarse green uniforms were covered with equally coarse yellow braid; their small, sharp, cunning eyes, their snub noses, and scrubby beards gave them a general aspect of cruelty and low-class brutality; but being fresh from their barracks in Sebastopol, they had not the wretched and tattered appearance of the Allied troops.

Like the rest of his brother officers, Sir Harry, even in

his full uniform, would have cut a strange figure at St. James's or Buckingham Palace. The fringe of his bullion epaulettes was now torn to pieces, and little more than the shoulder-plate and crescent of each remained ; his shoulder-belt had long been destitute of pipe-clay ; his bearskin had become a rusty brown colour, and his crimson sash, which was then worn in the hideous German fashion, round the waist, was frayed to tatters, and his hands were gloveless.

'Then it would seem that yonder scoundrel's pistol-shot has not injured you, Melville?' said Sir Harry, in a low voice ; 'when you reeled back, by Jove, I thought he had done for you !'

'My pocket-book saved me, Sir Harry—it bears the mark of the bullet,' replied Julian, showing a distinct indentation on the leather case.

'Ah—the—the—with the handkerchief,' said Sir Harry, his eyebrows slightly elevated.

'Yes,' replied Julian, curtly, as he replaced it in his breast-pocket.

'Do you always carry that thing about with you ?'

'Yes, Sir Harry.'

'Why, pray ?'

'Simply because I have no other place for it.'

Sir Harry actually felt—like the prick of a pin—a sensation of something that, if not quite jealousy (how could *he* be jealous of a private soldier?), was very nearly allied to it.

He eyed Julian closely for a time, and then said : 'You certainly are not what you seem.'

'I hope I am, at least, a soldier, sir,' said Julian.

'Every inch, old fellow !' replied the young baronet emphatically ; 'but I mean—excuse me—that you must have seen better days.'

'We all have, Sir Harry ; even you would seem out of place in Regent Street or Pall Mall now.'

'In these togs—by Jove, I should think so ; but—but you know what I mean,' continued Sir Harry, anxious, now that they were on a subject to which they could not recur again, to elicit some light on the subject of that mysterious handkerchief ; 'by education and bearing you were evidently meant for another sphere.'

‘I thank you for thinking so, Sir Harry ; but I am now in the sphere which fate has assigned me,’ replied Julian, with an unmistakable inflection of melancholy in his voice, which at all times was a pleasantly modulated one. ‘I often get low and out of heart—down a peg or so, like a fool, perhaps ; but I suppose every man in this world has some little history of his own.’

‘And yours, my good fellow?’

‘Is a sad one—thus, Sir Harry, I would rather not be questioned about it.’

This was said very quietly, but with an unmistakable hauteur of tone that made Sir Harry drop the subject, and a sudden commotion among the Russian artillery close by the cavern now gave him something else to think about. A hoarse word of command was issued ; the guns were speedily limbered up, the horses traced, and with whip and spur, and making the while a tremendous clatter, with all their spongers, rammers, buckets, chains, and spare wheels, the guns of the flying battery, for such it was, departed at a rasping pace towards Sebastopol, crushing down alike the dead or dying that lay in its route, while the roar of the battle came every moment nearer and nearer. As the wheels went over the dead, Julian more than once saw the latter, by some contortion of the muscles, start horribly into a sitting posture, and then fall prostrate again. The reason of the increasing musketry fire was this. When the camp of the 2nd Division was menaced by the presence of the Russians, General Canrobert, with three regiments of Zouaves, five of the infantry of the Line, and a heavy force of artillery, made a furious attack upon their flanks, and from that moment the issue of the battle became no longer dubious, and welcome to the ears of our exhausted and toil-worn soldiers was the sharp sound of the French drums beating the *pas de charge*, and of the Zouave trumpets, as these active and hardy little fellows, with their swinging kind of quick march, and reckless and brigand-like bearing, advanced into action and drove all before them. The same strange wail that was heard at the Alma when the Russians gave way now woke the echoes of the Valley of Inkermann, when their sombre battalions wavered, broke, and fled in headlong rout towards a range

of hills that overlooked the city, hotly pursued by the mingled troops of the Allies ; and by three o'clock in the afternoon the victory was complete. The loss of life was terrible : of the Allies there were 4,338 killed and wounded, and of the Russians about 15,000 ; and as the area of the field was very limited, being confined to the Inkermann Valley and the little redoubt, the scenes on every hand far exceeded the horror of battles in general, by the display of human passions and human anguish, fury, and hate. All around, God's fair earth was almost hidden by the bodies of maimed and mangled men, either stark and pale in death, or writhing, shrinking, and slowly moaning under wounds of every description. Many—too many—of our dead were found, when cold and stiff, with hands uplifted, and horror and entreaty too plainly depicted in their pallid faces, showing that they had been bayoneted in cold blood, and had perished in the act of futile supplication. Among those so found was poor Bertie Slingsby, of the Guards. In that carnage there also perished Julian's French friend, the young Zouave, who had rushed into action with his green and unhealed wound, and was never seen again ; so how he fell, or by what manner of death, none knew. But the Crimea, like the Peninsula, Egypt, and many other lands where our people have fought and conquered, was a place for brief regrets. As Julian, with his companion (who was still faint and ill with the effect of the half-spent bullet) leaning on his arm, picked a way towards the camp, the sickly sun of the chill November afternoon shone upon a scene that now, when all fierce excitement had passed out of their hearts, was calculated only to draw forth their emotions of pity and horror ; for there lay Guardsmen, Linesmen of many regiments, Zouaves, and Russian infantry and riflemen, in every conceivable position, many with blackened, distorted, and bloody faces, and some wearing, in death, a species of ghastly grin ; some seated half upright among the gorse bushes (where the scared birds were twittering), their jaws fallen, and open eyes fixed with a stony glare. For days the burial parties were engaged in the task of interring the slain, and the fullest military honours were paid to the remains of Sir George Cathcart and other generals who had fallen. In one grave were laid side by side—a sad sight indeed—eleven

officers of the Household Brigade, all of them young men, who had displayed the most heroic courage. By the vast hecatombs in which the dead were thrown, ever and anon the working parties paused, shovel in hand, while the chaplains proceeded with the solemn burial service—‘I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord,’ till these beautiful words seemed to lose all effect, from their very reiteration.

‘This brilliant but terrible victory sent to the already overcrowded hospital at Scutari a frightful addition of wounded and dying men. Borne in the arms of their comrades from the field of battle, jolted in rude conveyances over the hills to Balaclava, they were embarked in small and filthy transports, to be tossed on the waves of the Euxine. In the passage across it, many perished amid the terrible deficiency of medical assistance, and even of medicine and dressing ; each ship was veritably a chaos of dying men, ghastly wounds filth, cholera, and fever !’

* * * * *

Ere Julian could leave Sir Harry Drake, and report himself as safe and sound at the head-quarters of his battalion, he had to assist him as far as his hut, and, as they passed on towards it, they saw old Colonel Kingsmuir, riding at a hand gallop, but still bareheaded, towards Lord Raglan’s quarters.

‘Well, thank heaven that fine old fellow has escaped the carnage of to-day,’ said Sir Harry ; ‘and few of us, I believe, will forget Guy Fawkes’s day at Inkermann ! To talk of rewarding you, my friend, would, I know, be a bootless task,’ he added politely and gratefully to Julian, ‘but ere you go, you shall have a glass of wine with me.’

‘Thanks, Sir Harry—the work of the last few hours has given me a thirst indeed !’

‘Men don’t perform such services for each other every day as you this day have done for me.’

Here his eye fell on his cousin Bertie’s unclosed letter. He had heard of his death, but not as yet the barbarous mode of it ; and he trembled and bit his lips as he glanced at the dead man’s hurried writing :—‘Just going into action ; if I am spared, be thankful and rejoice, dearest mother ; if not, thank God that I died a glorious death, and shall meet you hereafter. My love to everybody at home—good-bye—

God bless you all. Kiss' (here was a girl's name, written tremulously) 'for me, and believe me ever, my dearest, dearest mother, your affectionate and loving son.'

'Poor Bertie! poor joyous, boyish Bertie!' said Sir Harry, as he covered his face with his hands; 'for him the veil is lifted now—he has learned the great secret of Time and Eternity!' and overcome by the events of that terrible day he fairly wept, and Julian, as he quietly withdrew, certainly did not think the less of his courage and greatness of heart for the manly tears he shed.

CHAPTER XLVII.

IVAN MOURAVIEFF.

IN the history of the Crimean War, we are told that, at Inkermann, 'among the prisoners who fell into our hands was a Russian major, who, more than once, had been heard ordering his men to murder the wounded.'

That major belonged to the Jakoutsk battalion, the corps of Ivan Mouravieff, and he was captured by Colonel Kingsmuir and a few men of the 20th; and it was concerning him, and the guilty act in which he had been discovered, that the Colonel had been proceeding to Lord Raglan's cottage when last seen by Julian. Two days after the battle, when the latter and two of his Guards' comrades, who were detailed for future trench duty, were amusing themselves by making some of the stray soda-water bottles, picked up in the vicinity of the officers' tents, into mimic shells or impromptu hand-grenades, by filling them with powder, bits of iron and bullets, with a fuse run through the tightly wedged cork, an orderly came with a message requiring his attendance at Colonel Kingsmuir's hut; and in great doubt of what that officer wanted with him, and fearing his secret had been discovered, he proceeded to that part of the camp apportioned to the head-quarter staff, and found the Colonel seated alone in the tent which formed the outer half of his abode.

'You are aware, Melville—that is your name, is it not?—of these stories with which the camp is resounding, concerning the murder of our wounded,' said the Colonel, 'and you, I understand, have actually *seen* this barbarity committed more than once?'

‘I have, sir.’

‘Sir Harry Drake has told me of the great service you rendered him the other day, and your gallant conflict with five Russians—actually five!—but a man of the 49th did something of the same kind near the two-gun battery. Such bravery deserves some high recognition, and would obtain it in any other service than ours,’ added the Colonel, for the Victoria Cross had not as yet been instituted. ‘When last here, you said that you could recognise the officer you had seen assassinating the wounded in the sortie of the 26th of October?’

‘Without a doubt. I saw the same man again at Inkermann, and saved Sir Harry from his butcherly hands. I should know him among a thousand, by the great scar on his cheek.’

‘Good! Then I shall require your services. On these matters I am to proceed towards Sebastopol with a flag of truce. The man we suspect of having been the spy, and who gave the enemy a notion of the angles of our zigzags, has a high command—or is supposed to have such—in that quarter of the city near the battery of the Naval Brigade. There is just a chance that you may recognise him, if he escaped Inkermann, and you shall accompany me.’

‘I thank you, sir, for the honour.’

‘This murder of wounded men is an atrocity that has no parallel in modern war. It is frightful!’

‘Not when judged from a Russian point of view, sir,’ said Julian. ‘Do not Segur and Fazensac tell us of equally terrible things in their campaigns?’

‘Ah—you have read Count Segur and Fazensac?’ said the Colonel, with a tone of surprise, and Julian coloured when finding that he was forgetting his *rôle*. ‘Surely a young man of your education should be elsewhere than in the ranks. I must look to this.’

‘I thank you, sir, and shall wait outside your tent,’ replied Julian, as he withdrew.

To any other private soldier all this would have proved both flattering and encouraging; but Julian shrank from all such patronage, as calculated to excite envy and comment among those who were his comrades, and to deprive him of

the mask he chose to wear, and to die under, if Fate willed it should be so. No emotions of satisfaction, pride, or hope swelled up in his heart as yet ; he was simply dogged, defiant, indifferent to the past as to the future. The worthy Colonel could not understand why Julian shrank from him and his friendly encouragement, and deemed him either soured by misfortune or eccentric by nature ; but he was able to perceive that there was some strange mystery about the young man. Could the Colonel have seen through it all ! Kate, his daughter, was once the early love of Julian—and loved passionately, too ; *now* she was Julian's stepmother, and he laughed at the situation ; he had come to that mood at last. Yet he had a profound regard for the brave Colonel, whose voice and face brought back so vividly the home of his boyhood, whose grey hair of a few years ago was white now as the down of the thistle, and who had ever been the kind friend of his old grandsire, the veteran Captain, of Fairy Knowe ; and he felt that he could follow him to death, and give a life to save his. A few minutes afterwards saw them proceeding direct towards Sebastopol. The Colonel was on foot, with a despatch from Lord Raglan addressed to Alexander, Prince Menschikoff, on the subject of the recent atrocities ; but it was feared that little would be achieved by it or would accrue from it, as that General—though he joined a natural bluntness of manner to a very active intellect—had in his nature much of that foul barbarism which is so often found to be singularly associated with culture, politeness, and manners in the mind of the Russians. Julian had a large white handkerchief attached like a banneret to the shaft of a Cossack lance, and followed the Colonel, accompanied by a drummer of the Coldstreams. Heavy firing was at that moment going on along the whole of the French attack, and in some parts of our own, but it ceased when word was carried along the lines that a flag of truce was going into the city. Proceeding due north, they passed the very place where the spy had spoken to Julian on his post, and on this occasion he found himself for the first time among the works of the sailors' battery, under the gallant Peel, where they had about two hundred ship-guns and mortars, of the heaviest calibre, which they were wont, when bombarding, to fire in

salvoes, like broadsides, every three minutes, sometimes for eight consecutive hours, causing a roar and concussion that shook both earth and air. Away in rear of their works were their tents, inscribed, according to their ships, as belonging to the '*Trafalgar's* Lambs,' or the '*Bellerophon's* Doves,' and so forth ; and the ease with which these active, lissom, hairy, jovial, and muscular fellows, with their splendid development of bone, chest, and arm, trundled about great guns, twelve feet long, and weighing in many instances 113 cwt., and singing and laughing the while, astonished the most sturdy of our artillerymen.

Leaving behind the trenches, where our soldiers were working with John Bull's cheap shovels, which had been sent home as useless by Wellington from Badajoz and Ciudad Rodrigo, but kept carefully in store ever since, the flag of truce was taken by its bearers, in perfect security, towards the city, over ground that was literally paved with shot and fragments of exploded shells ; and high and strong, massive and grim, before them rose those famous fortifications which the allies had permitted the famous Francis Edward Todleben to raise around a once open city, and thus enable it to resist all their most gigantic efforts for more than a year of suffering and carnage.

Once or twice, from eminences, they had glimpses of the far extent of that noble harbour, where so many ships lay sunk, and of the long bridge of boats that lay within the inner basin between the frowning batteries of St. Nicholas and St. Michael.

On drawing near a gate of the city, the Russians, with their flat glazed caps and grey *capotes*, were seen clustered in groups at the embrasures, watching the approach of Colonel Kingsmuir, who waved the despatch he held, while the drummer beat a *chamade* on his drum. The wicket or klinket in the vast gate was then seen to uncloze, and two Russian officers approached to anticipate any closer advance of the flag of truce to their works, being well aware, by their own use and wont, that communications of this nature are frequently designed for the mere purpose of gaining intelligence and of reconnoitring batteries and outposts.

The Russians were tall and powerful men, but meanly

featured, and closely shaven all save their thick mustachios. Their loose grey *capotes* were open, and thus revealed their dark green uniforms, laced with silver, and adorned with several medals and military orders, among which was the order of St. George, one only given for brilliant deeds. They had long swords and large military boots, with massive spurs; and in one, by his face, his crooked moustache, and black, beady, almond-shaped eyes, and more than all, by his singularly livid scar, Julian, as he felt his heart bound, recognised Ivan Mouravieff again, the Colonel of the Jakoutsk Regiment, a somewhat savage battalion, raised in Asiatic Russia, among a people of Tartar origin and habits—Ivan Mouravieff, whom the reader must not confound with the famous General of the same name, Nicolas Mouravieff, whom Sir W. F. Williams repulsed before Kars, and who died in September, 1866.

Thrice had Julian now seen this man, so it was impossible that he could be mistaken. The Russian never thought of looking at a mere private soldier, who, as in duty bound, stood some paces behind the Colonel, and thus Julian could closely study his face and actions unobserved.

The other proved eventually to be the gallant old Kokonovitch, who afterwards, unfortunately for himself, commanded in the fortress of Kinbourn.

‘May I inquire the object of this flag of truce?’ asked Mouravieff (who, as we have said, was an able linguist) in excellent English, while politely responding to the salute of Colonel Kingsmuir, who was somewhat relieved to find that he would not be compelled, as he had feared, to ‘air’ his French.

‘The object is, sir, to deliver this despatch, addressed to Alexander, Prince Menschikoff, commanding in Sebastopol, concerning the inhuman slaughter of our wounded by your troops on more than one occasion, but more particularly in the late battle of Inkermann. One of these assassins, a major, is now in our hands, and will no doubt be dealt with according to the laws of war. Another, known well to be Colonel Mouravieff, and whose name may be familiar to you, I hope we shall capture in time.’

This was all said with perfect coolness and candour by the

Colonel, who was quite unconscious of whom he was addressing. Mouravieff, who had a cigar between his lips (the men of Jakoutsk are known to be the most assiduous smokers in the world), flicked the ashes of it with a finger on which a large diamond ring was flashing, and eyeing the Colonel firmly, but curiously, said :

‘There is more than one Mouravieff in the Russian army.’

‘I do not believe there is another such scoundrel as he of whom we have sufficient details.’

The Russian now grew pale with suppressed fury.

‘I did not come to discuss his character or his crimes,’ said the Colonel, loftily ; ‘but simply as an officer of Lord Raglan’s staff, to deliver this despatch.’

‘Thanks,’ said the other, taking the sealed document ; ‘and what do you propose to do with the Major ?’

‘Try him and hang him, as we shall do Mouravieff the spy, and every Russian we find in future violating the laws of war.’

‘Enough of this, sir,’ exclaimed the Russian furiously ; ‘you may fall back upon your lines.’

While he and his brother officer, who seemed to expect some explanation of what was passing, conferred for a moment together, Julian said, in a low and agitated voice, as he began to fear the flag of truce might be violated :

‘Colonel Kingsmuir, be wary, sir ; the man with the scar is Mouravieff, the spy, the assassin, I spoke of.’

‘Great heaven !’ exclaimed Kingsmuir, as his face purpled with indignation, and a little confusion too ; ‘are you sure of this ?’

‘Sure as that I now live and speak to you.’

‘So, sir,’ said Colonel Kingsmuir fearlessly, and half turning away in contempt and disgust, ‘*you* are the Mouravieff to whom I have been unconsciously referring.’

Sombre passion appeared in the face of the Russian, while his beady eyes gleamed, and the gash on his cheek became almost black.

‘Dare you make these accusations to my very beard ?’ he exclaimed.

‘I do, sir,’ responded the Colonel, stoutly and fearlessly.

‘On what authority ?’

'That of a man whose personal description of you strictly accords with your appearance.'

'And who and what is he pray?' asked the other scornfully.

'A soldier of our Guards.'

'A soldier—a peasant—a lying serf, no doubt.'

'Neither peasant nor serf, Colonel Mouravieff,' said Julian proudly and undauntedly, remembering, or rather forgetting himself; 'but one who in birth and blood is a better and truer man than you!'

Mouravieff, all unaccustomed to be accosted in such a tone, looked sharply at the speaker, and appeared to recognise him.

'This man we shall detain,' said he.

'Detain?' repeated Colonel Kingsmuir; 'dare you fail in respect to a flag of truce?'

'If the bearers of flags of truce violate truth and propriety, why not?'

If seized and taken into Sebastopol, Colonel Kingsmuir knew that some obscure and terrible fate would be the doom of Julian. He said firmly, 'He goes back to the British lines with me, or I too shall remain a prisoner.'

'Take care what you say, sir,' replied Mouravieff, with a mocking smile, 'you know not all that being a Russian prisoner may involve.'

'In my case it may involve a general assault of Sebastopol. But this interview has been protracted long enough.'

Colonel Kingsmuir then turned on his heel, and, preceded by his flag-bearer and drum-boy, keeping his own person between them and the Russians, he stepped haughtily off in the direction of the sailors' battery; and certainly he did feel they were all the safer when they drew near it. Mouravieff, in fact, cared very little about being reported to Prince Menschikoff for the misdeeds laid to his charge, but he felt intense scorn and rage that the chief evidence of such reports should be merely a private soldier, whom in rank and condition he, as a Russian, deemed no better than an ignorant peasant or slave-born serf; and the parting glance he gave Julian augured little good for him if *he* ever fell into his hands in any fashion. Whether by chance or design it could not, of course, be known, but just as the trio drew close to the sailors' battery, a round-shot, fired from the gate they had left,

ploughed up the ground with such force that Julian reeled and fell, and his bearskin tumbled off.

'A kind farewell, and proof of Russian honour, while our white flag is still flying!' said Colonel Kingsmuir, as he assisted Julian to rise; 'you are not hurt, my lad, I hope?'

'No, sir, thanks—but we have had a narrow escape,' he added, shaking the dust from his grenadier cap, and as he did so the face of Colonel Kingsmuir changed in expression from anxiety to extreme surprise.

'*You*,' said he, as they entered the sheltered pathway in the works, 'you are the young man who protected me with his bayonet, and remounted me, on that night when the trenches were scoured! I now recognise you, for on that night you lost your cap.'

'True, sir; a ball knocked it off.'

'Then, like Sir Harry Drake, to you I owe my life!'

'If you are pleased to say so, sir.'

'Why did you never claim the reward I offered?'

'I did but my duty; and it would ill have become me to accept the guineas, even to spend them among my comrades.'

'You shall have a noble reward for all this, if it is in the power of me to obtain it for you,' said the Colonel emphatically. 'Stay,' he suddenly added, as Julian was about to resume his cap, 'your name is Melville—Julian Melville?'

'Yes, Colonel,' replied the other, into whose weather-beaten and faded young face the blood rushed hotly.

'I have been blind in not recognising you before! My poor lad, how came all this about?'

Julian looked down sadly; the time he had dreaded and done his best to avoid had come inexorably to pass, and he shrank instinctively from speaking of himself, and laying bare his miserable story, of the greater features in which the Colonel had not the most remote conception; and Julian felt keenly and bitterly that in it there were secrets, 'like those wonderful hopes and dreams that lie down deep within us, and go to make up the concealed life of our dearest feelings, and cannot be spoken of to the world.'

'How came you to be soldiering here?' asked the Colonel, patting him kindly on the shoulder; 'surely this is a sad reverse for you.'

'Misfortune left no other course open to me—I could neither dig nor beg. It is through no error of mine that I stand before you, Colonel, a private soldier to-day.'

As Julian spoke, his brow was knitted into two upright lines, that made him the image of his father, Deloraine.

'And the poor old Captain!' said Kingsmuir, as his eyes glistened; 'how many a cosy chat about old times, and how many a tough bout at chess, we have had together! Ah, by the way,' he added, with a little laugh, 'in those days you used to have a boyish fancy for my Kate—got over all that sort of thing, of course.'

'Oh, quite, Colonel.'

'Dear Kate is a married lady now—quite a little matron.'

'I have had much to think of since those days,' said Julian, with a dreamy smile and husky voice.

'And your brother, who was always mooning about, book in hand—he is well, I hope?'

'I can only hope so, too—for I know not!' said Julian, in a voice now thoroughly broken.

'This state of affairs must be mended,' said the Colonel, kindly patting him on the shoulder, 'and I must see you again about them. In making my report to Lord Raglan, I shall not fail to tell him you have done other services than recognise our friend Mouravieff; come to my tent to-morrow, and I will speak with you again.'

Julian did so, fruitlessly, as it proved, hoping and wishing he scarcely knew what; because, for long after that day of the recognition he saw nothing of Colonel Kingsmuir, who, after being suddenly seized with fever, had been conveyed on board of one of the hospital ships at Balaclava, where he had a narrow escape from perishing on the night of the 13th November, when one of those terrific gales for which the Black Sea has a fatal celebrity caused immense loss to the Allied shipping, and dreadful suffering to the troops. Tents and huts were alike uprooted, amid a deluge of rain, which converted both camp and trenches into a chaos of mud and water. There, under 'the fierce pelting of the pitiless storm,' our brave soldiers passed a night of singular horror—such a night as those at home could form no conception of. They were without shelter, food, or fire; many men perished from

cold and exposure, and more than forty horses were found dead when morning dawned.

Drenched with rain and weary with toil, many lay down amid the half-frozen slush in the trenches and strove to sleep : but at midnight the roar of a cannonade aroused them from their miserable slumbers, and a sortie of Russians, fresh from their barracks, came furiously out, believing that the Allies would be, as they really were, worn out with fatigue.

The little ray of hope—it might be of ambition—Colonel Kingsmuir's last words had kindled in Julian's breast faded away, and the old bitterness came over him. He might find—and as a unit fill—a nameless grave, like the thousands he had seen after Alma, like the thousands after Inkermann—poor Achille, the Zouave, among others ; and she, that same Kate who had so loved him once, and the gentle and generous Amy, whom he knew had never ceased to love him, would never know his fate ; but what did it matter ?—what had he to live for ?

Most awful were the days and nights of duty in the trenches, where the relays of troops had to shiver for twenty-four hours, at a time too often amid mud that was knee-deep, and which, as the dreadful Crimean winter drew on, was always frozen in the darker and colder hours before dawn. There they huddled together for warmth, and there, in many instances, they died, side by side, while the red bombs went whistling in fiery arcs overhead.

Fever, cholera, and cold slew as many as the bayonet ; nor was hunger wanting amid the horrors of the protracted siege ; for at length half-rations, and then only quarter-rations, were issued to the troops, and firewood became so scarce that meat, in many instances, was eaten raw.

‘It is useless for gentlemanly tastes, and longings for white-bait, iced champagne, and so forth, to crop up here,’ said Julian one evening, as he accoutred himself in the dusk. ‘I’m bound for trench-duty,’ he added to a comrade, ‘and may not come back again—many go to the front and come back no more. Here is the last shilling I have in the world, Tom ; get what you can with it at the sutler’s hut—and now, ta-ta, old fellow, good-bye.’

‘For to-night only, I hope,’ responded the other, who

pocketed the donation, and muttered to himself, 'What is up with Melville—he seems in a reckless mood at present, poor fellow; but he is not worse off than the rest of us,' he added, as he watched, by the light of a pale young moon that glistened on the distant spires and domes, the dark mass of the relieving column toiling through mud and snow, and disappearing, with the flash of sword and bayonet blade, into the shadows of the night, to begin the twenty-four hours of unspeakable misery in the perilous trenches.

It was only 'a day's pay,' poor Julian's farewell gift, but hungry Tom thought, as some have it, 'that surely such loving and unselfish natures as his shall find their deeds recorded on high, and meet with their reward.'

CHAPTER XLVIII.

REVELATIONS.

THE scene changes again.

The same pale crescent moon that looked down upon our soldiers shivering and dying in the half-frozen trenches of Sebastopol, was shining sweetly and peacefully on the quiet scenery, the smooth turf and trees, of Hyde Park, and on that curiously varied line of fashionable mansions named Park Lane, where every style of architecture—and too often no style at all—stands side by side.

The Deloraines were still in town, though the season was winter. The Earl had been, as he phrased it, 'in a bad way for some time past,' and in the doctor's hands. The fast pace he had gone for years was telling upon him now and making him prematurely old—to his own horror, even grey!

For the first time in his life he found himself compelled to relinquish his fox-hunting.

A yacht voyage to the Mediterranean had been recommended by the medical faculty, when the season opened, and Kate had actually schemed out that, beyond Malta and the Ionian Isles, they might, like some other yachting folks, venture into the waters that washed the now sadly historical city of Sebastopol.

Dwelling in the lap of luxury and peace, little could she

conceive the scenes that were hourly being enacted there, nor could she contrast them, even in imagination, with her own surroundings, as she sat in her stately inner drawing-room, with its beautifully-papered walls and pannelings of white and gold, its velvet carpet of the most delicate tints, its silk curtain, of the softest rose colour, its *jardinières* and objects of *vertu*, among which, on a *guéridon* table, was a beautiful miniature fountain of Bohemian glass spouting a pleasant perfume.

At her davenport of rosewood, inlaid with engraved and lovely mother-of-pearl, she was now writing 'to mamma at Malta,' concerning the projected voyage 'in Julian's charming yacht,' in which they hoped to bring her and the Colonel home together, for, surely, the latter had seen enough of fighting and sickness now.' Amy Kerr was with her as usual; Kate was never like most young married ladies, who avoid third parties as visitors, for she usually had quite a circle about her; and now Amy's pretty fingers were knitting most industriously, as if her food depended upon her exertions, some complicated thing in Berlin wool—as all the girls in Britain were doing then—for our soldiers and sailors before Sebastopol, when she could with ease have bought a ton weight of such matters in Oxford Street; but, then, did not a little Scottish school-girl send a pair of warm cuffs to old Sir Colin Campbell, who wore them when he led the thin red Highland line at Balaclava?

For weeks they had heard nothing of Colonel Kingsmuir, save that he had left the camp ill; but whether he was at Scutari or Malta they knew not, for the electric cable, which was then being passed from the Crimea, under the Black Sea, to Bulgaria, and from thence to Britain, was not complete, and the mails were far from certain.

Dinner was just over, a luxurious one, from the oysters to the coffee and maraschino; and, as one at the Star and Garter on the previous day had not improved his lordship's system, the Earl was rather 'down a peg;' yet he was fondly, or, perhaps, rather admiringly, regarding the elegant figure and graceful head of Kate as she bent over her desk.

'Ah,' he was thinking, 'we Deloraines have always been famous for wedding beautiful women, and it is a good

tradition to keep up in a family—especially one so old as ours.’

And Kate, quite conscious that he *was* admiring her, played at times coquettishly with her wedding-ring, unconscious, apparently, that it was the ring of the lost Julian’s mother. At this time a liveried servant glided to the Earl’s elbow, with a card on a salver.

‘Mr. Gerard Melville! who the deuce is he?’ asked the latter, reading the superscription, half in a dream and half startled by the old, familiar name, and feeling just then disinclined to be troubled with any one or anything. ‘Show him into the library, unless he will tell his business.’

‘He declined to do so, my lord,’ replied he of the shoulder-knot, who certainly had tried to worm it out of the visitor, together with half a crown.

‘Very well—I’ll see him. It is, doubtless, some begging-letter affair.’

Dinner, we have said, was over, and the hour somewhat late for a stranger especially to present himself, and as this one was very plainly, almost shabbily attired, the acute hall-porter—acute, at least, in such matters as costume—left him in the vestibule, while the card was taken up a stately staircase, rich with green carpeting, and snow-white statues bearing shaded lamps.

In the subdued light of the cosy library, face to face were the father and his youngest son, and as the former thought of the situation, or what might spring from it, for a moment he felt savage with the world in general, or as the Scots say, ‘at large.’

Gerard’s heart was throbbing, as he stood, hat in hand, and bowed, as he would to a stranger; and, sooth to say, he had scarcely seen that ‘evil Earl’ before, but now his face brought back to memory that of Julian. That of Gerard—ever thoughtful, yet good-humoured, ever full of hope, love, and goodwill to mankind, had a weary look that was strangely blended with triumph and with something of sorrow and hostility, for he had a difficult part to play—something startling to announce—and was somewhat ‘dashed’ by the unusual magnificence of his surroundings.

His fair face—fair, with his soft eyes and crispy, golden-

tinted hair, that started from his forehead in sprouts—was one that would seem bright even in death ; but it looked strange and earnest to-night.

‘May I inquire the object of this visit?’ asked the Earl, haughtily, and looking as unconscious as he could, yet something was whispering in his ear, ‘Be sure your sin shall find you out.’

‘If you will permit it, my lord, as it is a family matter, I should like my communication to be made in the presence of Lady Deloraine.’

‘Of Lady Deloraine!’ exclaimed the Earl, astounded by the calm deliberation of this reply.

‘Yes.’

‘A lady, Miss Kerr, is with her just now, and to what end——’ the Earl was beginning hotly, when Gerard simply waved his hand and said :

‘Then let the lady come, too—my old friend, Amy Kerr, may as well hear to-night what all the world will know to-morrow.’

‘They are here,’ said the Earl, haughtily, and feeling somehow that his visitor was not one to be trifled with, for the raised voice of Gerard had brought the two ladies to the open door of the library, which adjoined the outer drawing-room.

‘Gerard—why it *is* Gerard Melville!’ they exclaimed together, welcoming him with both hands in honest warmth of heart, while the Earl’s brow became deeply knitted.

‘Oh, Gerard,’ added Amy, ‘how we admired your novel, and that sad, sweet Salome, your heroine!’

Gerard, at the name, grew pale and utterly confused for a moment ; but turning to the Earl, he said :

‘The proofs, the long-lost proofs, of my mother’s marriage to one every way unworthy of her have now been found, my lord. I was resolved, if such existed anywhere, to procure them, and a secret voice within me seemed to be ever urging me on till I did find them, most miraculously, and can now solve the sad story of our mother’s wrongs and *your* cruelty to her—to Julian—and to me!’

Kate, at these strange words, grew pale as death, and Amy, fearing that Gerard had lost his senses, was about to rush to

the door, which the Earl had carefully closed to preclude any eaves-dropping.

‘Moderate your tone, sir,’ said he, sternly, ‘and remember that any communication you have to make is for my ear alone.’

But it was not so; the young Countess had heard too much not to be anxious to hear more, and as she glanced breathless from the pale face of her husband to the equally pale one of Gerard, she saw that the latter was the possessor of some secret or power over the former that controlled his usually passionate spirit, and subdued his generally haughty bearing; and a great fear, she knew not of what, took possession of her.

‘Speak, Gerard—what does all this mean?’ she urged, piteously.

Modestly, briefly and tremulously, unwilling to sting her by speaking too severely of her husband—of his own father, he related, with a voice that seemed full of tears, the story of his mother’s wrongs, of the secret marriage contracted in her girlish love and folly—a marriage repudiated, ere the honeymoon was well nigh past, under the mal-influence of a foreign adventuress and *intriguante*, the Baroness Sonnenberg; of where he and Julian were born, and how Gladys had died of a broken heart, in ignorance that her wedding was strictly in accordance with Scottish law, and that proofs of it—irrefragable proofs—were in existence, and had been placed by himself in the hands of those who knew how to use them—proofs that made his dear brother Julian, if living, the undoubted Lord of Hermitage, and heir to a Scottish Earldom; and poor Kate heard him as if turned to a stone, while the Earl did so in equal shame, mortification and bewilderment, for he was aware that the miserable Uriah Grippie was dead, and had lost the documents long ago.

‘And where did you find these so-called papers?’ asked the Earl, after a pause, and unwilling to deem himself baffled yet.

‘Where he, who failed to sell them to you, placed them.’

‘How came you to know they were in existence, and where?’

‘Ask me not *who* was my informant; but they shall speak

for themselves,' replied Gerard, in a subdued voice, as the bewildering memories of Wiesbaden came over him.

'Speak—tell me all this again,' said Kate, with one hand placed on Gerard's shoulder, and another on her heart, as if she felt a pain there, while avoiding her husband's face.

Gerard told her that on reaching the town where the country solicitor had lived, and hearing of his death, he had half lost hopes, but while wandering at sunset on the bridge of the Nith, he came suddenly upon one they would both remember in Ettrick, Ringan Jannock, the reckless Border poacher, of whom he knew little that was good and much that was evil ; but his home face was a familiar one, and he had so few friends in the world that for a little time Gerard's honest heart actually warmed to the worthless fellow, from whom he learned that though the wicked lawyer was dead, his house, with the date and legend over its door, was still in existence, near the river, as a tavern.

Thither he went, and pretending to be an artist who wished to paint the river scenery, he procured, but not without some difficulty, the very room he wanted—the panelled room of which he had received a description, and which overlooked the vast expanse of the Nith. There, among the old wainscoting of the wall, he saw the little knob, like a lion's head, which indicated the secret recess, and with a heart that beat wildly and painfully, the moment he was alone and secure from interruption, he pressed the spring, the panel unclosed, and therein he found carefully docketed in the handwriting of Uriah, and bound with red tape, the whole of the documents proving the marriage of his mother to the then Lord Hermitage, the identity of himself and his brother, and also more than one letter from Deloraine offering a princely sum for their surrender.

In his latter days Uriah Grippie had been much given to walking in his sleep, and this tendency to nocturnal perambulation had cost him his life. We have in a preceding chapter referred to his dream that the papers were lost, and his terror and bewilderment on finding that they were so. In his sleep, then—when under the influence of one thought—the security of those papers which might have brought him so much money, he had gone to that place and secreted

them ; and it is strange that in his sleep the same idea or recollection had never occurred to him again.

Gerard had believed implicitly in the letter and the promise of Salome, and in addition to these, had the positive conviction—the expectation that sooner or later all the required proofs would come to light. Whence this confidence rose he knew not ; but his success was complete. How the strange Salome (of whom he could not trust himself to speak), save by some occult power, became possessed of the knowledge of a secret so remote and obscure, was beyond the conception of Gerard, and he could but hope that he might live to learn the key to it all.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE EFFECT PRODUCED.

CRUEL and callous as he was by nature—a man upon whom no human trouble made the slightest impression, unless it affected himself personally—to a man of the Earl's fierce pride and haughty spirit, the humiliation of the present hour—one fated to stamp itself on his memory for ever—was, if painful, salutary. His hair was damp with perspiration, and hot shame alternated with livid pallor in his face. Even Gerard felt for him ! *Who* could have told the latter of the existence of those papers and *where* they were, when even the wretched Grippie knew not, or failed to remember, where he had concealed them, even when offered a sum for which, thought the patriotic and parental Earl, the greatest lawyer in Scotland might sell his father's bones ?

‘And where now are the originals of those so-called documents, young man ?’ he asked, loftily, breaking a silence that had become oppressive to all ; to none more than Kate.

‘In the hands of the most eminent legal firm in Scotland—a firm now in immediate communication with your lordship's agents concerning them. Surely you do not think I would be foolish enough to carry them about with me, or to bring them *here* ?’

Deloraine ground his teeth.

‘The duplicate certificate of the marriage, bearing your lordship's signature, is fully corroborated by the documents

that accompany it, and its date corresponds with that which was engraved on the wedding-ring of my mother.'

Kate drew off the fated ring, and looking at the inner side, saw, what she had never seen before, the date engraved—for the hoop had never left her finger since the Earl had placed it there : and she had been married with a dead woman's marriage-ring : an ominous feature, as every crone in Kingsmuir knew. Its first wearer had not been a widow ; but she had been the mother of Julian—her husband's son. Oh, what an odious coil all this was ! All Julian's apparently wild and enigmatical language with reference to the Earl, when he lay on a bed of suffering, was fully explained now, and it came back to her memory with every significance. She felt a despairing species of chill steal over her, and strove to conceal the emotion from the Earl. Whatever he had done in time past, however barbarously he had used poor Julian and his brother, she was now his wife ; she must do her duty as such, she felt, and to obey and still love him, if she could, were a part of it. Poor Julian ! she now saw and felt what she never felt or saw before, how *his* secret knowledge of the situation must, in his young heart, have added to the bitterness of her desertion of him.

'And you decline to say how you came to have a knowledge of these documents?' asked the Earl for the third or fourth time.

'Rather let me say that I cannot,' replied Gerard. And as he spoke, his face and eyes seemed to assume the expression (as they had the likeness) of those of Gladys, as the Earl had last seen them, full of intense upbraiding, on the day he left her at Wiesbaden. In all this affair there was a mystery that impressed him, and added to his perplexity ; for instinctively Gerard shrank nervously from all reference to Salome.

'Oh, Deloraine !' exclaimed the Countess Kate, in a tone of anguish, while entwining her soft and lingering fingers within his, and suddenly and sharply withdrawing them when he attempted to return their pressure.

The Earl was conscious of the unusual action ; also that she did not call him 'Julian,' and bad though he was, he felt a pang.

'And to obtain or destroy these holograph documents you actually offered a great sum to this man who is now dead,' she said, while weeping.

'I was never a saint, my dear girl, and could never live as a hermit.'

'But, but——' her voice was choked in tears; her cheeks were crimsoned with shame, and she dared not even look at those who pitied her, Gerard and Amy Kerr.

'Kate,' said the Earl, in a tone of remonstrance, as he bent over the chair into which she had flung herself, 'this affair was the one great mistake of my life, and I have been run to earth at last.'

'The one?'

'Never can I make such another,' was the evasive reply.

'I should think not, my lord!'

When they were alone he was always 'Julian,' he noticed, and felt the difference again.

'It was the best thing that could have happened to me—that quarrel—that separation—in Germany,' he whispered in her ear; 'it gave me you, my own sweet Kate.'

She only shivered under his touch and wept, while her memory went upbraidingly back to that sunny day when in the garden at Kingsmuir Amy had rallied her on the coming of Deloraine, then Lord Hermitage; and inspired by a little pique or jealousy, had spoken, apparently with mockery and pity, of Julian Melville! To Kate, pure, good, honourable and high-souled, these revelations and the new and startling light thrown upon her husband's character, and the real story of his past life, proved a grievous shock indeed!

'Oh, heavens!' she thought, 'can the man to whom my parents gave me for a title be capable of baseness so great?'

'My Lord Deloraine—father!' exclaimed Gerard, as his voice grew tremulous with tender emotion, 'for you are my father!'

'Well?' said the Earl, sharply.

'Let the dead past bury its dead; receive me as your son!' Then they shook hands for the *first* time; but how cold and nerveless on one side was that shake of the hand!

'And Julian?' said Amy, inquiringly, her mind filled with one thought.

'Julian, poor, poor Julian,' exclaimed Gerard; 'he, the Lord Hermitage, is now serving in that horrible Crimea as a private soldier; or *was* so until lately.'

'*Was*—a soldier—a soldier in the Crimea?' exclaimed Kate, in sorrow and bewilderment, while Amy Kerr, trembling in every limb, and faint and pale as death, regarded Gerard with dilated eyes and parted, speechless lips.

'You know not the son you have lost!' said Gerard to his father reproachfully; 'you know not him you have cast forth to penury, it may yet be death! But,' he added after a pause of surprise, 'you surely saw this morning's paper, my lord?'

He *had* seen the leading journal, and knew to what Gerard referred, but had kept silence thereon to his own household, by whom it had been passed over unnoticed, and he now affected to feel some interest in it when Gerard drew forth the paper, and laid it before the ladies, who were astounded by the paragraph.

It was a brief statement, among the latest items of war news from the East, that for two acts of special bravery, Private Julian Melville, of the Foot Guards, had been gazetted to a commission in the Royal Scots regiment of Fusiliers. These acts were, protecting Colonel Kingsmuir of the Staff from the bayonets of the Russians, and remounting that officer, who had been unhorsed during a midnight sortie; and also saving the life of Sir Harry Drake of the Coldstreams, at great hazard to himself, and after a most unequal conflict with no less than five of the enemy, who had been assassinating our wounded at Inkermann. In addition, it was said that this reward had been given by Lord Raglan at the special request of the Colonel, who in this young soldier had discovered the *grandson* of an old brother officer. 'The story is known to all,' added the war correspondent, in his nervous style, 'and our soldiers, fresh from victory and carnage, after that terrible day at Inkermann—the battle of the rank and file—in every hut and tent, spoke only of Melville of the Guards!'

'This proof is enough surely,' exclaimed Gerard, with kindling eyes; 'there are not likely to be two Melvilles named Julian, and both the friends of Colonel Kingsmuir!'

The Colonel had duly written of all these stirring passages to his family; but the mails had perished in the Black Sea, and

thus through the medium of the press did they first become known to those whom they interested most deeply and keenly.

‘So our Julian is true to the fighting instincts of his race!’ exclaimed Gerard; and even the callous heart of Deloraine caught a little of his enthusiasm; but these new tidings, coming so rapidly after the late revelations, filled Kate and Amy with fresh wonder and such great sympathy that some time elapsed ere they could speak or think of them with coherency, and to do so was somewhat of a relief after the painful story they had heard. And so he had actually saved the life of her dear, dear father, and raised himself to the rank of a commissioned officer, this poor waif, so wronged, so blighted in youth and manhood—so sneered at by her mother, and so pitilessly cast off by herself! was the first thought of Kate, while both Gerard and Amy shared her genuine joy and satisfaction. He had ever hoped that he, or his brother, might yet do something great or glorious in some way, where, when, or how, he knew not, but something that might make their unnatural father proud to own one, if not both, of his sons; and now a double act of great bravery in the field had been done by Julian—by the Lord Hermitage, for as such he should soon be known to all! He was a soldier still in that land of hourly peril and of unparalleled suffering; but he no longer ran the risk of perishing obscurely now, unnamed and unknown. He was now an officer in the same regiment to which his grandsire had belonged, the old Captain at Fairy Knowe—the same regiment in which the old veteran had served under Cornwallis and Abercrombie—his once happy movable home, round which his fondest traditions, thoughts, and memories hovered, in whatever land it was serving, while life lasted,—the old Scottish Fusiliers, whose colours were first unfurled on the field of Bothwell Bridge. The revelations of that evening made it one never to be forgotten by those who were present, by none more than Amy Kerr, whose sweet, bright face grew brighter with the double joy of hearing of Julian’s existence, and of his just and true position. If she loved Julian before, in the past time, when they were wont to meet at Kingsmuir, and as the poor stricken creature she had last seen in London, much more did she do so now, when she learned *who* he was,

how wronged and cruelly humiliated ; and how nobly, bravely and worthy of his race he had acted at Sebastopol. And how strange it seemed that he should have saved the life of her suitor, Sir Harry Drake, his own rival, though he knew it not.

‘But Julian would have done it all the same—my own dear Julian !’ thought the girl in her heart.

And when she spoke of him afterwards to the somewhat crushed and distraught young Countess, her eyes became eloquent and beaming with pity and love ; while to the animated expression of her certainly beautiful face, and to the play of her features, she added the graceful action of her shapely hands ; but Kate seemed to see before her only the grim, abashed face of Deloraine.

Full of bright and happy dreams of the future, waking dreams, Amy lay with her soft cheek smiling on her laced pillow, sleepless, far into the hours of the night, amid surroundings very different from those of him who occupied her thoughts. He, too, was lying on *his* pillow ; the billet of wood that was to boil his ration beef next day.

With a promise to Kate that he would return early on the following day, Gerard had gone to his hotel, and the Earl sat long in the library, full of thoughts of a very sombre cast. He turned his dark eyes, into which a kind of stealthy expression had come, from the shaded lamp, and remained with his forehead pressed on his hand, on the finger of which sparkled a diamond, given by the selfish old earl, his father, when he was dying, and in dying, cared for nothing human but his equally selfish son, and then only as the inheritor of his title—Deloraine ! The mask he had worn to many, and more than all to Kate, was removed now, and she was mistress of his cruel secret and strangely barbarous conduct.

‘Sons grown up to manhood, two of them—the devil !’ thought he, as he had often thought before : ‘the world puts its nose into everyone’s business, and dearly dotes on scandal ; so the less cause now I give for speculation the better.’

He took in the whole situation, and seeing the futility of resistance, if that duplicate certificate proved what Gerard and the now dead lawyer (on whom he mentally invoked the deepest curses) asserted, he resolved to accept it without the nuisance of a public legal procedure in the Scottish Courts,

He knew enough to be aware that by the law of Scotland marriage is not looked upon as a sacrament, but rather as a civil contract to which two elements are essential, mutual consent, and some documentary or other mode of indisputably proving that consent. He knew that law and custom preferred the performance of the ceremony by a clergyman of any known faith, but that it admitted of many other methods, as, for instance, writings like the contract framed by Uriah Grippie, who was, moreover, a justice of the peace ; verbal or other pledges given in presence of witnesses, and that to this hour people may contract such an alliance by simply presenting themselves before the nearest sheriff, and publicly accepting each other.

And to this effect did his lawyers very plainly put his situation, when by the post next morning his lordship received a letter from his astounded agent in Edinburgh, that clenched the whole affair in all its legal details, asserting alike the validity of the documents produced, and of the claims so boldly announced by Gerard, and that resistance on his part, even if he thought of it, was vain.

Mentally his lordship indulged in many evil words, and then muttered :

‘Egad, it is as well I threw up the sponge handsomely to that young fellow last night !’

Remorse, compunction, or pity for the sufferings that must have been endured by the poor dead Gladys and the proud old soldier, her father, he had no more now than he had when the wicked Sonnenberg bore him away in triumph at Wiesbaden ; but now, certain new thoughts, on reflection, occurred to him, when through the medium of a goblet of iced champagne he reviewed the *dénouement* of last night.

Of other heirs to the ancient title of Deloraine there was no prospect, and he hated with all the animosity of which he was capable the kinsman to whom, in default of such heirs, his estates must inevitably go.

He saw that Gerard was every inch a courtly gentleman ; and he remembered that the other son he had used so cruelly was even more so in aspect and bearing ; and he knew that by habit, education, and culture, both were well calculated to take their place in the great world, and perhaps to shine

there ; when both might have been equally his sons, and totally unrepresentable.

He racked his invention—never a very brilliant one at any time—to conceive in what fashion the strange story of these newly-found sons should be made public to that atrocious bugbear known as ‘ Society,’ and he actually shivered and ground his teeth as he thought of the clubs, their speculations and laughter.

He gave it up as ‘ a bad job—an infernal bore,’ and resolved to leave to his lawyers the mode of framing the paragraph by which it should first be made publicly known, also the suitable allowances to be accorded to them, and the amendments, in future editions of Burke and Debrett ; and meantime, he would put the silver streak between himself and the British Isles, by sending his yacht to the Mediterranean, and joining her at Marseilles.

The Earl was not a good-natured man, and never had been, as those who are wont to have little peccadilloes usually are ; yet he was anxious to make his crime against Gladys appear as small as possible to Kate and her friend ; but for the soul of him, he knew not how to go about it, or how to frame an excuse ; thus he had taken refuge in silence and acquiescence in the undoubted claims so firmly advanced by Gerard, on the part of his absent brother and himself.

In fact he was compelled to eat the most humble of humble pie.

Hence it was that as he had listened over-night to the accumulated evidence of Gerard, a grey look came into his face and a troubled expression into his eyes, that quailed beneath those of his gentle and honest-hearted son.

One feature in the whole affair alone pleased, while it surprised him, and this was the knowledge that the entire sympathies of Kate were with Julian and Gerard.

Luckily she had no children of her own to excite the least emotion of jealousy or repining at their being totally supplanted by those of a woman whom she never heard of before ; and, moreover, they were not as strangers to her, for Julian and Gerard had been the friends and playmates of herself and her sisters in childhood.

Gerard, when he left London for the North, had begun to

think—notwithstanding his ill-luck—of trying another novel to recruit his finances ; of ‘putting his shoulder to the wheel,’ as the saying is, and obtaining a footing on the first step of the ladder that was to lead, perhaps, to fortune ; but the documents so prized and so strangely put into his possession, the tidings he had of Julian, and the other work to be done, absorbed every thought ; and *now*, the recognition of his place in society rendered such exertion of his talents, unless for his own amusement, unnecessary. Yet to be idle, and careless for the future, save in so far as his brother was concerned, seemed strange to a mind so active as his ; and since the advent of Salome he had become a deeper thinker and dreamer than ever.

The darkest hour is always that which precedes the time of dawn ; so it is often with the affairs of men, and ere the tide of fortune turns.

Of all these matters Gerard wrote to his brother, telling how measures were in full progress to assert their position and prove their birthright ; and that to be for a time out of the way, the Earl was hastening his yacht voyage to the Mediterranean ; and his brotherly heart and hand trembled, and his eyes grew moist with tears of joy, as he addressed the letter to ‘The Lord Hermitage.’

This he had to enclose in another envelope, as Julian had been gazetted under the name of Melville ; but, indeed, by the current of events, poor Julian was fated to see neither the cover nor its enclosure.

CHAPTER L.

THE CAPTURE OF KINBOURN.

JULIAN was still fighting the battle of life and death with starvation and the Russians before Sebastopol. In many respects his comforts were few—even less than when he was lost in London, but there were plenty of shot and shell to fill up the intervals of time, and give little space for reflection ; and the whole army was in the same condition of rags and wretchedness, a state of matters to which the great loss of transports and stores in the Euxine contributed quite as much as ministerial mismanagement at home. After the delivery, by Colonel Kingsmuir, of the remonstrance to Prince Gorts-

chakoff from Lord Raglan into the hands of Mouravieff and Kokonovitch, no more authentic cases of the murder of our wounded were heard, save in the instance after the first repulse at the useless and unwise attack of the Redan.

So the worthy Colonel had not, as we have shown, forgotten Julian's interests and advancement ; neither did Sir Harry Drake, who, when the announcement appeared in the *Gazette*, sent him a handsome pair of gold epaulettes, for such badges of rank had not as yet been abolished in the British army ; and the kind baronet did more, for he begged his acceptance of a cheque on the paymaster, 'as a brother officer,' to help him with what he might find necessary in his new career as an officer of the Scots Fusiliers, not that there was any difference in the comforts or equipments of any rank in the Crimea now.

Appointed to a commission—a place given to him in society and among gentlemen again ! Could Gerard but know of this, thought Julian, ignorant of all that had so lately been transpiring in the house at Park Lane. Save Gerard, he thought there was no one else at home who had an interest in his fate ; of Kate he never thought at all, save in conjunction with her father ; and times there were when he forgot to think of Amy. His acts of special bravery, exaggerated perhaps, and some vague stories of his antecedents, that soon found their way in true Scottish fashion into the ranks of the Scots Fusiliers, soon made Julian somewhat of a lion in the corps, and his own character and bearing seemed to confirm all these ; while his brother officers were pleased to find that he was now only in his proper place ; that he was noble and distinguished in air, and a gentleman in his bearing—even his tattered uniform could not hide that ; while he had much of grave, sad, manly beauty in his face, overlaid at times with a hard and stern expression. And now for the first time did real ambition and the desire to achieve something great and glorious replace the dull, desponding indifference of the past, and flame up like a new fire in the heart of Julian.

The close of that year of suffering saw the smart affair known as the 'capture of the ovens,' in which our Rifles covered themselves with glory in a struggle with the bayonet, among the ancient caverns and old stone huts used by the

Tartar shepherds in more recent and peaceful times ; and in the March of the year following the Emperor Nicholas, the originator of the war, died. But the ghastly strife went on in the Sea of Azov and along the banks of the Tchernaya ; in the battle of which the French were so kind and tender to the Russian wounded, and so reverently covered with pieces of cloth the upturned faces of all their own dead whom they were unable to inter on the evening of the conflict. Month succeeded month of peril, slaughter, and death by starvation and disease, as well as by shot and shell ; the Redan was stormed ; Sebastopol was bombarded for the fifth time, set in flames, and abandoned by the bridge of boats on a night when sea and sky seemed alike sheeted with fire, and pillars of dusky smoke appeared to prop heaven as they rose above the doomed city, while the vast multitude of its garrison poured darkly away in silence, by the long bridge of boats, which was instantly cut ; and as that great pontoon, a quarter of a mile in length, swung heavily round, our troops found themselves in deserted and devastated Sebastopol, while the last of the scuttled Russian fleet disappeared in pyramids of flame amid the waters of the inner harbour. Mighty indeed was the carnage in the four armies ere all this was achieved ; but Julian had as yet escaped without a wound, and by the casualties of war—promotion went by succession then—found himself well up the list of lieutenants in his corps.

The Crimea was not yet cleared of the Russians, and though our camps and hospitals were full of wounded, no man spoke yet of peace, and none could very precisely see how the war was to end.

The flame of ambition, we have said a few lines back, had now, fortunately for himself, been kindled in the heart of Julian, and he felt that

‘ Who does it the wars more than his captain can,
Becomes his captain’s captain ; and ambition,
The soldier’s virtue, rather makes choice of loss,
Than gain which darkens him.’

By this time, like all the rest, he had become so inured to war and its perils, and so sick of the siege of Sebastopol, that when he found his new regiment was detailed as part of

the force destined to storm and destroy Kinbourn, he regarded that expedition as a pleasant little bit of excitement—a change of scene to ‘fresh woods and pastures new.’

Thus by use and wont, when face to face with the enemy, though some senses become unusually acute, others are for the time completely deadened ; hence Julian had learned to go about his perilous occupation heedless of what the day might bring forth, though it was sure to bring wounds, agony, and death to many. Yet, amid the callousness induced by war, human sympathy and feeling at other times come to the surface, and of this he was sensible during the last duty he performed before leaving the camp.

A young subaltern of his regiment had died in his hut after long suffering from a wound inflicted by one of the last shots fired from Sebastopol. He was a handsome fellow, and beloved by all in the corps, and all of the latter who were able attended his funeral, at which Julian commanded the carrying party—firing there was none. The band, or what remained of it, played the funeral march from his hut to his grave, beside which the pipes sent up their farewell wail. The coffin, one of plain white deal, was covered by a Union Jack, whereon lay his sword and cap. The burial place was Cathcart’s Hill (since covered with the tombs of the slain) ; in full view lay Sebastopol, with dome and spire, bastion and roofless houses, steeped in the amber glory of the sun then setting amid the waters of the Euxine.

Bright purple clouds were crowding over the valley of the Tchernaya. Near the improvised burial-ground were groups of soldiers, who were off duty, and looked quietly at the every-day sight ; some cavalry videttes dismounted and stood at their horses’ heads ; a few civilians from Balaclava uncovered as the impressive scene closed with the last words of the chaplain, just as the sun went down, to flood other scenes and shores with its light ; and as Julian’s eyes, seeing all through a kind of mist, turned westward, he could not but think, insensibly, of *who* the next might be for whom these sad offices were required, and of the other land or shore, ‘where there shall be no need of the sun to lighten it ; where there shall be no more tears or breaking hearts ; where sorrow and trouble shall have passed away.’

It was in October, after the fall of Sebastopol, that the allied Generals resolved on the reduction of the Russian fort at Kinbourn ; and prior to the attempt our Black Sea fleet weighed and stood along the shore, to the great terror of the Tartars, whose pretty and peaceful villages, with vast herds of cattle grazing on the green slopes, and their farmyards filled with autumn produce, were distinctly visible, especially when the squadron drew near the mouth of the Dnieper. The troops which sailed on this duty—one most brilliantly performed—consisted of the 17th, or Leicestershire, the gallant old 20th, the Royal Scots Fusiliers, and the old 57th (or Diehards), forming the First Brigade ; the 63rd, with two battalions of marines, formed the Second, in addition to which were some cavalry and artillery ; but they had not left the camp before Sebastopol many days, ere conflicting and distressing rumours began to prevail there that our forces had been defeated by Kokonovitch, the Russian commander, now a major-general, and that the 57th Regiment and the Royal Scots Fusiliers had been literally destroyed.

We are somewhat minute in our details of this expedition, as Julian's share in it proved a very unfortunate one, though he had the good luck to be on board the *Valorous* (the flagship of Admiral Sir Houston Stewart), with his friend Colonel Kingsmuir, who had rejoined from a hospital ship, as he said, 'to have one more shy at the Russians before going home.' His old friend, Lord Raglan was dead, and thus he cared to remain at the Crimea no longer, and felt that he had done enough for glory now. After his hut in the trenches, Julian felt himself, as it were, surrounded by all the luxuries of life on board the *Valorous*, even though he had been able, more than once before he sailed, to despatch his soldier-servant to Balaclava for many hitherto unusual comforts from the store of those specious rascals, Messrs. Hookitt and Pawsey.

On a bright evening, when the spires of Acmetchet, and the rocky and varied Crimean coast, were visible in a blaze of sunshine from the windows of the state-cabin of the *Valorous*, as the allied fleet stood across the Gulf of Perekop, or Kerkinet, and the officers were lingering over their dessert and wine :

'I owe all *this* to you, Colonel,' said Julian, in a low and

almost tremulous voice, after he had been silent for some time amid the gay and rattling conversation of several officers of various arms of both services ; and he almost feared it might all be a dream, from which he might awake to find himself in his wretched hut again, a private, or shivering half asleep among the gabions of the advanced parallels, a sentinel, in his tattered great-coat.

‘Nay, nay,’ said Kingsmuir, kindly, ‘take your wine, my boy, and don’t thank me ; to yourself you owe all. Ah, if the old Captain had only lived to know it, and that you are now in the old corps he loved so well ! Perhaps he does—who can say what the dead know, or do not know, or whether they even care for the events that occur on earth, all momentous as they may seem to mortals ? But we won’t moralise—it is dreary work at best,’ added the Colonel, as he drained a glass of Moselle, and held it out to be refilled by the marine who acted as waiter.

But it was impossible for Julian—practical though misfortune at home and the sufferings incident to war had made him—not to muse over all the strange past ; of Kate and the Earl, of Mrs. Kingsmuir, of all the first-named was to him once, in the time that seemed to have been ages ago, and the little, in one sense, she was to him now. Anon he would think of what he ought to be, and of his birthright—for he could little dream that in his father’s home and household he was now acknowledged as—the Lord Hermitage !

‘Heaven teach me to cease repining over the impossible,’ he thought. ‘I am very ungrateful, I fear, to think of these things, when God has been so good to me !’

Then he was roused from his reverie by a clapping of hands, mingled with a hurrah.

‘Pass the wine, gentlemen,’ the jovial Admiral, who had first smelt powder at Flushing and Acre, was saying cheerily ; ‘we drink to the successful bombardment of Kinbourn, and the capture of that stout old blade, General Kokonovitch.’

‘Bravo—another bumper to the first man inside the enemy’s works !’ added Kingsmuir.

On the 14th of October the fleet was off the scene of the intended operations.

Kinbourn lies in the government of Taurida, on a narrow

peninsula, opposite to Octchakov, and at the mouth of the Dnieper. Its situation renders it a place of great strength, but the locality labours under the serious disadvantage of having neither wells nor springs ; thus fresh water can only be procured from the town just named, eleven miles distant. Below the dark and massive fortress are a number of houses occupied by Russian peasants and seafaring folks employed in the lucrative herring and anchovy fisheries. Kinbourn, with the rest of the Crimea, was conquered by Russia, but has repeatedly been attacked by the Turks, and in 1787 was the scene of one of 'the hero-buffoon' Suwaroff's famous victories, an event to which Kokonovitch made glowing reference more than once to his troops. Prior to this, in 1781, a civil war had broken out among the Crim Tartars, in which the Russians interposed, and in 1783, Sahim-Gheray, the last Khan of the Crimea, abdicated his power, which he transferred to the Czars. This acquisition was confirmed by treaty with the Porte in 1784, since when all Taurida has been deemed a Province of the Russian empire.

In beautiful order, with all their vast spread of white canvas swelling out before a soft breeze, snowy white, despite the smoke of their low raking funnels, and with their colours flying, the ships took up their position according to the orders of Admiral Stewart, those that ranked as line-of-battle, to engage the fort and two sand-bag batteries at the point of the peninsula, anchoring in thirty feet of water at twelve hundred yards range—the *Montebello*, French line-of-battle ship, being the fourth from the south of their line, and the *Royal Albert* the southern ship of the British division. The mortar vessels came to anchor at two thousand eight hundred yards from the shore, while the *Dauntless*, *Terrible*, *Tribune*, *Curaçoa*, and *Sidon* anchored off the north sandbag battery, with orders to fire steadily into the embrasures of the casemates, which were full of Russian troops.

On the same night, the 14th, the *Valorous*, with several French and British ships, forced the passage between Octchakov—which is now only a cluster of Russian cabins near a ruined citadel—and the peninsula of Kinbourn, and getting into Dnieper Bay, completely invested the port.

On the 17th, without molestation from Kokonovitch, our

troops, in heavy marching order, with arms loaded and bayonets fixed, while rending the air with cheers, were all landed from the line-of-battle ships, in the great launches and paddle-box boats, and began at once to intrench themselves on the sandy peninsula ; the mortar and gunboats bombarded the works with incredible fury for three hours, without producing the least impression, and some bands of Cossacks, mounted on rough shaggy ponies, riding with short stirrups that brought the knee to the pommel of the saddle, and brandishing their long lances, the steel heads of which flashed in the setting sun, were visible as they scampered to and fro in the neighbourhood of Kherson, till vigorously attacked by some French cavalry, who routed them, sabring some and capturing others. On this bleak peninsula our troops lay for the night in their great-coats, for they had not, like the French, *tentes d'abri*, which are simply formed in most instances by blankets stuck on bayonets, and they lacked the skill possessed by our allies for making little harbours formed of boughs of trees.

Julian's heart grew sad when he saw the free and jovial-looking Zouaves, with their madder-coloured breeches and red turbans, and remembering poor Achille Richebourg, thought how happy that young Frenchman would have been to see *him* with epaulettes on his shoulders ; but the majority of the French troops there were linesmen, or 'Tourlourous,' as the Parisians call them, a name which has supplanted the Jean-Jean, but means the same thing.

Julian had hoped that the Royal Scots Fusiliers would be the first regiment ashore, but that honour fell, by right of seniority, to the 17th, which sprang into the surf and formed up under arms with colours flying.

In the dull grey dawn of an October morning, when the sea was calm and the wind off shore, the gun and mortar boats got up their steam to open on Kinbourn. By this time the troops were all under cover, in works which cut off Kinbourn from the land side ; the French had the direct line of operations against the place, while the British guarded the rear from any attack in the direction of Kherson.

Kokonovitch, on finding the sap pushed to within seven hundred yards of his batteries, opened a dreadful fire from them, from guns which he fought *en barbette*. To this our

gun and mortar boats responded, and the crash of their shot was terrible ; the whole sea on one side of Kinbourn was lashed into foam, from which spouts or great pillars, white as snow, were started incessantly by the falling shot and shell. By eleven in the morning cheers in the trenches greeted the appearance of fire within the fort, where a conflagration broke out in the barracks and rapidly spread from end to end, filling the whole place with smoke and flame, the heat of which drove the Russians from their guns ; while, to enhance the confusion, incessant explosions of ammunition were heard from time to time, as magazines and tumbrils ignited and blew up. About this time another cheer greeted the disappearance of the Russian flag—St. Andrew's cross—which was shot away and not displayed again.

Kokonovitch made a desperate defence.

'We shall soon be done with those cursed allies,' said he confidently to Mouravieff, his second in command, who held the northern fort on the peninsula, 'though Sebastopol has fallen. Their alliance won't last. The Briton, the Frank, and the Turk can only pull together like the pike, the crab, and the swan in Kriloff's fable,' he added, referring to a political caricature of the time, then circulated in Russia. A severe wound, received early in the bombardment, only served to add to his fury and resolution, and the doctors were without lint to dress it ; in the true spirit of Russian speculation, the commissaries are alleged to have sold, secretly, all their lint and bandages to the allied armies.

By the time the standard was shot away the cannonade from the fleet was simply tremendous, so enormous were the guns with which it was armed.

The French admiral in the *Asmodie*, and Sir Houston Stewart in the *Valorous*, came round the Spit Battery into Kherson Bay, followed by eleven great steamers, delivering slowly, in stately succession, their thundering broadsides at the batteries as they passed, literally beating to pieces and ripping them up. The sky seemed alive with flaming rockets and bursting bombs, and below it the fort was sheeted with red, roaring fire, for by twelve o'clock another conflagration had broken out within it. Towering in their stately magnificence, with their lofty rigging and white canvas spread, the

steam frigates took up their positions off the seaward face of Kinbourn, already sorely battered by the gunboats, and soon effected any destruction which the latter had left incomplete.

Grand and awful at this time was the storm of that mighty cannonade, to which Kokonovitch responded with eighty-one pieces of cannon and twelve great mortars ; but around him bastions were being beaten to dust, and, blown about by the gentle breeze, the embers of the burning barracks and other buildings covered all Kinbourn and the Bay of Kherson. Ere long we dismounted or smashed thirty-four guns on the works, but stoutly and bravely did the Russians handle those that remained ; but still the broadsides came thundering from the seaward, and still death and havoc, wounds and suffering, deepened around grim old General Kokonovitch.

While all this exciting work was in progress, Julian, with the rest of his company, was lying quietly *en perdu* in a sandy trench on the Kherson side ; he was watching the bombardment through a field-glass, while some French cavalry were patrolling in the rear to watch the advance of any relieving force, which the British would have to keep in check. But his time for rougher work was coming. When Kokonovitch found that further defence was futile, he held a hurried council of war, and proposed to capitulate ; but even then, amid the roar of the conflagration, the crash of falling walls that were shrouded in smoke, the explosion of bombs and rockets, tumbrils and magazines, and the thundering broadsides of the allied fleet, making up a medley of sound that was not apparently of this earth, Saronovitch, a Polish officer, and two others, one an engineer and the other an artilleryman, all inflamed by fanatical fury and fiery vodka, swore, 'by the life of the Czar, that they would not surrender, but would blow up the magazine the moment the enemy entered Kinbourn.'

'This is madness,' said Kokonovitch.

'It is not,' they replied ; 'we can defend ourselves for a week yet.'

'Impossible !—you have not been able to fire a shot for a quarter of an hour. Are you likely to be in a better condition two hours hence ? And, above all, where are the sur-

vivors of the carnage you court to live?—already we have not a roof left to cover us.’

Then, by order of Kokonovitch, an officer waved a white flag from the shattered ramparts, on which the firing instantly ceased, and there seemed a lull in the very air, as its last echoes died away on the sea, and when no sound was heard but the surf of the latter as it chafed against the walls of the fortress. With white flags of truce displayed at their sterns, several boats now pulled in shoreward ; and when the British admiral and Colonel Kingsmuir landed, they found the French general advancing to meet General Kokonovitch, who came forth alone and unattended, with a sword and pistol in his right hand and a pistol in the other.

The pistols he discharged into the earth in token of surrender, and threw the drawn sword at his feet.

‘ Oh, Kinbourn ! Kinbourn ! ’ he exclaimed, in a passion of bitterness and rage, while actually shedding tears ; ‘ glory of Suwaroff, but scene of my shame, I abandon you ! ’

Terms were given and accepted by all, even by Saronovitch ; but again, when they were signed, his veteran leader wept, and covered his wrinkled face with his hands, after casting from him, with a hoarse malediction, the pen with which he signed them.

Then in the evening, amid the Rembrandt-like masses of lurid light and sombre shadow, in which Kinbourn seemed to be passing away, as the smouldering flames burst forth ever and anon, the garrison, consisting chiefly of the 29th Regiment, clad in grey capotes and black glazed helmets, without spikes, marched into our lines, and laid down their arms, in many instances—for all were tipsy with vodka—dashing their muskets, with hoarse and fierce execrations, at the feet of their conquerors.

Ere our troops marched in, Kokonovitch gave them the friendly warning that the flames were now close on the powder-magazine ; thus steps were at once taken to avert what might have proved a lamentable catastrophe.

Mouravieff, who commanded in the northern fort, either was ignorant of all this, or affected to be so, and continued to blaze away with one large gun till a well-directed shot from the *Terrible* dashed the whole casement to pieces.

Preceded by a vocal company (which many Russian corps possess), the prisoners marched to the beach for embarkation, and were at once despatched to Constantinople—all, at least, save Mouravieff and Saronovitch, who broke their parole of honour, and escaped together.

CHAPTER LI.

THE RECONNAISSANCE TOWARDS KHERSON.

THUS far we have detailed an operation of the Allies which was subsequent to the fall of Sebastopol, and has been completely forgotten amid the greater interest created by that event.

The fort of Kinbourn was now ordered to be put in a state of defence, and its enclosure to be divided between the British and French troops, or a portion of them, while in order to discover alike the strength and position of the enemy in the neighbourhood of Kherson, a reconnaissance was detailed for a two or three days' march—a *promenade militaire*, as the French laughingly called it—as General Liprandi was alleged to have some 22,000 men under his orders somewhere in the province ; but posted as the Allies were on the narrow peninsula of Kinbourn, with a powerful fleet and a swarm of gunboats on each flank, three times that number of bayonets could not have prevailed against them.

Julian, glad to escape duty with the working parties engaged in rebuilding the curtains, clearing out the ruins, placing and replacing heavy guns, and so forth, found that his company was detailed as part of the reconnoitring force, which consisted of 4,541 infantry, with 279 cavalry. There was novelty and excitement in a duty of this nature, as any hour of the day or night might bring them face to face with the main body of Liprandi's army, or with its scouting patrols.

Leaving behind the long, low, sandy spit of Kinbourn, above which towered the top hamper of the war-ships, and skyward, higher still, the towering smoke from the funnels of the gunboats, the expedition departed.

It was now the end of October, a gusty month in that part of the world, and marked by cold rains and fogs. On every hand, as our troops marched, the country seemed to be a vast

plain, intersected by numerous streams, tributaries of the Bug and Dnieper. In some places the rank grass grew so high as to conceal the cattle that pastured among it, and the roads along which the force proceeded were simply marked by a ditch cut on each side.

The villages, the inhabitants of which are usually Bulgarian colonists, mixed with gipsies, Jews, and Tartars, were everywhere deserted on the approach of our troops, save in one, where an old Tartar peasant and his wife were found hidden up a chimney. By the fourth day they had wasted all the district, by burning the villages, and capturing immense quantities of poultry, pigs, and fat-tailed Wallachian sheep, and also some of the native cattle, which are generally white or silver-grey, with long horns.

Encumbered by all this spoil, the troop of the little expedition wheeled about to return to Kinbourn; and, though unmolested as yet by the enemy, their movements had been closely watched by 200 Cossack lancers, who had retreated before them as they advanced, and followed them up as they now fell back.

Julian's company formed the rear-guard, and the night was closing in, chill, dark, and misty, when an alarm was sounded, and the whole force halted. The rear-guard was ordered to face about, as the hovering Cossacks or some other force were alleged to be too close to be pleasant.

The place where they halted was reedy ground, which there swarms with wild ducks, geese, and pelicans, and also snakes of great size.

Julian was the only officer with the company; he was young, but on the alarm being given his own instincts instantly told him what to do. He remained quietly halted on the narrow path till reinforced, and then unfixed bayonets.

'From the centre extend!' was the next order, and away the men went, with a half-turn outwards, double-quick through the high reeds and brushwood, in what was then the fashion, six paces apart, in double file, the rear one regulating the distance, and the front looking to the direction. The moment the formation was complete they halted, and dropped, each man on his right knee, in skirmishing order, but nothing as yet was visible.

The bugle rang out 'Advance !' and slowly and cautiously they proceeded to creep through the reeds and bushes, and, as the position was one of considerable responsibility, Julian felt his heart beating high with ardour and excitement. Darkness had completely fallen now, and all was still save the sounds made by startled little earth-hares gliding to and fro, or flights of hawks that started from the gorse.

Suddenly an opaque mass in front, that appeared like a clump of brushwood or dwarf oak trees amid the moving trees, assumed the distinct aspect of a squadron of Cossack lancers, with the shafts of their weapons upright, at about four hundred yards distance.

Bang, bang, bang, went the Minie rifles, flashing out redly amid the tall reeds, and the sharp ping of the elongated bullet which we first used in the Crimea was heard. Then a few gaps were seen, as man or horse went down among the enemy.

'Form a rallying square !' cried Julian. Again the bugle sounded, and despite the many obstacles presented by the ground, the soldiers—who, under whatever circumstances, never forget the instincts of the drill-yard—rushed to the centre and formed a square, the rear face of which reopened a fire upon the Cossacks, who, instead of charging—being perhaps aware that a dozen of stout-hearted fellows formed thus are tolerably safe against a body of cavalry—scattered, broke, and began to fire with their carbines in a loose and desultory fashion.

The rear guard, having thus 'felt' the foe, and given the necessary alarm and indication as to his whereabouts, began to fall back, firing the while, on the main body, the men reloading, casting about, and capping their rifles with admirable energy.

'Well done, lads—well done ! Keep up your fire—pepper them well !' cried Julian, who already, in anticipation, saw himself, perhaps, thanked in General Orders for 'his vigorous and gallant defence in covering the rear of the reconnoitring party ;' and with this thought and hope a glow of genuine ardour and ambition, with the desire to live—or to die, if fate so willed it—with glory and distinction, swelled up in his heart anew.

But the Cossacks, who were commanded by a *pulkovnik*,

or colonel, a man of undoubted bravery, were not disposed to let Julian's little band have it all their own way, and now with wild cries they unslung their long and heavily-headed lances, and closing their files, prepared for a charge. They were too genuinely Russian in nature and discipline to disobey their leader when ordered, for the Russian soldier, says Dr. James Browne, 'is docile, submissive, and brave: like all slaves, he is supple, subservient and cunning: like all natives of northern regions, he is hardy, patient and enduring. He has no other thought than to do implicitly as he is desired; and there is a pertinacity in his nature which inclines him to persevere, or to stand firm, as the case may be, without troubling himself about consequences. His courage is the result of insensibility rather than of moral force of character. But there is, nevertheless, an element of indomitable ferocity in his composition; amidst all the apparatus and parade of civilisation he is still three parts a barbarian. Hence his most brilliant achievements have been performed under men upon whom the force of civilisation had made as little impression as on himself, and whom the instinct of sympathy had taught to develop his natural barbarism.'

But to return to the present emergency. The Cossacks, after firing a ragged volley with their carbines or pistols that were slung to the waist, rushed on with levelled lances, but had to recoil more than once before the steady fire from the rear face of the square, which was constantly renewed by men from the inner mass with rifles ready loaded, till the supports came up in strength, when the foe gave way and retired over the reedy ground, till they vanished into the mist and obscurity of the night.

We had a few men hit by pistol-balls, and others prodded by somewhat rusty lances; but none were killed. The loss of the Cossacks must have been severe from a steady infantry fire, and in addition to their casualties overnight they were somewhat roughly handled again, next morning, by shot and shell from a French gunboat that crept close in shore.

Ere this it had been discovered that the young subaltern who commanded the rear-guard so well and bravely was missing!

‘Where is young Melville—who saw him fall—who saw him last?’ were the hurried questions of the colonel and adjutant, reiterated again and again by Colonel Kingsmuir, when the detachment marched, with all its plunder, into Kinbourn.

‘Did he fall alive into their hands?’ the latter, asked eagerly.

‘Well, I hope not, sir,’ replied a soldier who was laden with the spoil of a poultry yard.

‘You *hope* not—why?’

‘Because the beggars would be sure to make short and sharp work with the poor young gentleman, any way.’

But no one had seen him, nor were any of his company, in the dark, the hurry, and fierce excitement of the whole encounter, aware of having seen him since the rallying square was formed about him. The roll was called, and every man answered to his name, though some looked faint enough, with bloody handkerchiefs tied in haste about their wounds. Julian alone was ‘missing’—an ominous word, which may mean prolonged agony, a death unseen and unknown, or a protracted captivity.

‘He must have been struck by a stray bullet and have fallen,’ said the adjutant. ‘Poor fellow—he was a good officer!’

And then, after a time, all speculation ceased. Many fell daily, and many—too many—had fallen; so now one human life mattered little more or less.

But not to keep the reader in suspense, we may here state the cause of his disappearance. Julian, quitting the security given him by being in the centre of the rallying square, which surrounded him like a living wall, had pushed through the close files to the rear-front, if we may use such a term, there personally to encourage resistance; but his foot became entangled in a gorse bush, he fell heavily on his face unseen by all in the darkness, obscurity, and smoke. The retiring company left him behind, and when he staggered up, a dozen of Cossack lances were levelled at him, and he would have been pinned to the earth, there and then, without mercy, but for the exertions and authority of the *pulkovnik*, close to whom he most fortunately happened to be.

He was roughly collared and sent to the rear under escort, the sole trophy of the Russians after the fall of Kinbourn;

and when day broke, and at the very time the French gun-boat was shelling the Cossack squadron till it galloped out of range, he was being conveyed inland, whither he knew not, with his right hand secured to the bridle of a Cossack horse, and three or four howling sons of the Don riding about him, mocking and jabbering, and ever and anon, in pure wantonness, menacing him with the point, or accelerating his pace by a smart application of the ironshod butt, of their lances.

These men were Cossacks of the Don, and were mounted on small horses of a stunted but famous race, hardy, enduring, and courageous—qualities which, whether in men, cattle, or dogs, beseeem a mountain origin. They were well made, even handsome and martial-looking fellows, with elevated eyebrows and heavy dark moustaches; they wore tall busbies of black fur, with crimson bags, and coarse blue jackets braided with yellow. Their high saddles were simply wooden frames, placed on the piece of folded felt which formed their couch at night, and they rode full-footed, with short stirrups, and always posted when at the trot—to Julian's eye a most unmilitary style of action and bearing.

He was divested of his sword, epaulettes, and sash, and much of the lace was torn off his coat from time to time; thus he presented a sorry figure after he had proceeded a few miles with his escort. He was deprived of his portemonnaie, but his pocket-book, containing the sole relic of his past life—the souvenir of Amy's kindness and tenderness—escaped, as the Cossacks searched about his knees for anything of value, their garters being the place where Russians usually carry or conceal their purses; but seeing, as the day drew on, that he looked faint and weary, one who was either more kindly disposed or less brutal than the rest drew a common soda-water bottle from his holster, and indicating that he might have a mouthful therefrom, handed it to Julian. The contents proved to be fiery vodka, a grain spirit (like the Turkish raki); and the Cossack also shared with him a piece of the black bread that was in his odiously dirty haversack; but the time was not one in which to be dainty or particular.

How long was this new state of affairs to last? thought Julian. When should he be released or exchanged? He

might be a prisoner during a long and protracted war ; he had heard of French prisoners who had languished in our British dépôts for twelve years at a time, till all hope and desire for life had died away in their hearts. But a few short hours before he had been at the head of his soldiers, in the full flush of ardour and a new authority, anticipating present praise and future honour.

Where were they all now ?

Two days he was compelled to march on foot, fettered as we have described, through a flat and uninteresting country, across comparatively valueless plains, where little corn was grown, but vast herds of cattle were fed for the tallow manufacture at Kherson, the capital of the province.

On the second day they entered a village in which the Jakoutsk battalion and the Erivan Grenadier regiment, two of the many corps whom we had beaten out of Sebastopol, were cantoned ; and followed by a considerable crowd, composed of loiterers of both regiments, Tartars and Bulgarians, all more or less menacing and hostile in aspect and bearing, the solitary and luckless British prisoner was conducted by his escort to a *traktir*, or tea-house, the principal species of hotel in the place, wherein the colours were lodged, and the officer commanding had taken up his quarters.

As Julian's hand was unbound, and he was conducted into the tea-room, the brick walls of which were alike destitute of paint or plaster, a group of Tartars, who were clad in a species of attire that looked like gaudy dressing-gowns, with gaily ribbed skull caps, and who were smoking long chibouks, started up with loud exclamations at his entrance.

This roused, with an interjection of anger, the Russian commanding officer, who, muffled in the inevitable capote, had been immersed in the columns of the *Moskauer Zeitung*, while imbibing his tea from a crystal tumbler in the old Muscovite fashion ; but we mean to say as little about Russia as possible, for does not Prince Dolgourauki, in ' *La Vérité sur la Russie*, ' tell us that the natives alone can write about that half barbarous country ?

Glad to see an officer at last, Julian was approaching, with the intention of begging that his epaulettes should be restored to him and his parole of honour accepted, when the

infantry *pulkownik* raised his head, and he found himself confronted by—Ivan Mouravieff!

‘By God and the Emperor!’ he exclaimed in English; ‘an island cur—an English dog—a sailor in a red coat!’ Then, seizing Julian by the throat, he buffeted him in the face with a hand cased in a thick military glove till the blood flowed from his mouth.

‘What is all this?’ asked an officer, coming forward, and who proved to be no other than Saronovitch the Pole.

‘He insulted me on the day the flag of truce came, after the Inkermann sortie; but, by the bones of St. Sergius, my turn for vengeance has come now!’

Weary with all he had undergone during the two past days, after the toil of the reconnaissance, somewhat faint by want of food, and confused by the weight and fury of this disgraceful assault, Julian, though his heart swelled with just indignation, and the proud, fiery blood of his race boiled, felt it sink within him. In the power and at the mercy of a man like this—one who, as a Muscovite, was without value for human life or pity for human suffering—prone, in the very lust of cruelty, to delight in the infliction of the latter—especially when his hate or other evil passions were excited, what had Julian to hope for at the hands of Ivan Mouravieff?

CHAPTER LII.

PRISONER OF WAR.

RUSSIAN civil authorities are lawless, and still more so are the military, over any unfortunate who may be at their mercy. ‘If you have been robbed once,’ says a traveller, ‘do not get robbed twice by going to the police.’ Thus, for Julian to appeal to any other authority against Mouravieff was perfectly vain. Moreover, he appeared to be the senior officer in the place. But to repress anger was impossible.

‘Colonel Mouravieff,’ exclaimed Julian, ‘this most infamous conduct to an unarmed prisoner shall be made known to all Europe!’

‘Will it?’ replied the other, mockingly; ‘Hospodi! Europe! that is a large word.’

‘Please God, it shall!’

‘I shall take care of that,’ was the ominous response ; ‘not that I care particularly whether it be known or not.’

Meanwhile, Julian, whose handkerchief had been stolen, had no means of stanching the blood which was flowing freely from his lips, till a kindly old Greek priest—a man with a bushy silver beard—stepped forward and gave him one of some coarse grey stuff, at the same time saying something in a tone of reprehension to Mouravieff, who retorted by an exclamation of scorn ; for however well-educated he may have been, the latter was evidently a lawless tyrant, with an ungovernable temper. Very different indeed in face, aspect, and bearing were he and his helpless prisoner ; and particularly in the form of the mouth did the two present a contrast. The lips of the Muscovite were thick and brutal as those of a bull-dog, while Julian’s were delicate, well-cut, and indicative of birth, culture, and the highest order of refinement.

‘Colonel Mouravieff,’ said he, in the desperation of the case not unwilling to temporise, if possible, with the man, while he detested and despised him, ‘am I to understand by all this, and more than all, by your ambiguous threat, that my parole of honour is not to be accepted ?’

‘Yes—precisely so,’ replied Mouravieff, who, we have elsewhere said, spoke English with singular fluency.

‘For what reason ?’ asked Julian, repressing his gathering wrath.

‘You need scarcely ask, when you remember your insulting conduct to me—the Colonel of the Jakoutsk Regiment.’

‘I do not comprehend you ; in what manner ?’

‘When you, who now pretend to call yourself an officer, but whom I last saw as a private soldier, presumed to accuse me of acting as a spy, and that too, at one of the very gates of Sebastopol.’

‘I had to accuse you of more than that, as you know well, Colonel Mouravieff,’ said Julian, whose temper was rising, ‘but that is all past now. I am, like yourself, a commissioned officer, and I claim to be treated as one, and as a prisoner of war. You are perfectly aware that we have met elsewhere than at that gate of Sebastopol.’

‘And you pretend, or assume that——’

Mouravieff paused, for he was choking with rage, and certainly Julian would have found perfect silence the better policy, but he unfortunately said,

‘I have known you by that which is doubtless a badge of honour—your scar.’

‘Scar?’ repeated Mouravieff, to whom this disfigurement was a source of genuine annoyance, and starting furiously from his seat, he dealt Julian a heavy blow with the hand on which he wore the great diamond ring, by the latter laying open the cheek of his luckless prisoner, whose face was again covered with blood.

Julian looked wildly round for a weapon; but luckily none was at hand, save those in the belts of the escort, who stood stolidly looking on a scene which, however outrageous and cruel, seemed nothing unusual to them. In his blind rage, Julian was about to spring on the aggressor, who read the coming action in his eye, and laid his hand on his sword; but at that moment Saronovitch threw himself between them, exclaiming: ‘You are utterly forgetting yourself, Mouravieff; let this affair end, and remove the prisoner.’

‘I tell you, Saronovitch, the fellow is a Pole, though he pretends to be an Englishman—one of the Island curs who hissed our Emperor in the streets of London.’

‘A Pole?’ said Saronovitch, pausing—himself a Pole, but a renegade one.

‘And as such, one whom I could try at the drumhead and hang over that doorway.’

Then, as Mouravieff spoke, among the crowd of soldiers who gathered in the entrance to the *traktir*, Julian could see how every eye glistened, and every row of teeth seemed set in their lowering visages; and his heart grew sick, for if this new idea were adopted his life was lost!

‘I have other views for him than the rope,’ said Mouravieff, with a sudden laugh like a snort. ‘If not soon on the march for Siberia, with one side of his head shaved, I shall have him imprisoned for life in a fortress, with a 36-pound shot at his ankles—and that may be before the frosts of St. Nicholas come!’

Julian was scarcely aware of all the mischief the Russian was capable of working him; but he had heard stories of

French prisoners, taken on the retreat from Moscow, being sent to Siberia, from whence they never returned; and he was not ignorant of the strange rumour current in our Crimean army, and revived since from time to time, that for insulting a Russian officer, the son of an Irish peer, who had been taken prisoner at Balaclava was sent as a State captive beyond the waters of the Lena. All this kind of treatment was very different from that experienced by the officers and crew of our frigate the *Tiger*, when taken prisoners on the vessel running ashore near Odessa, in April, before Alma was fought. But now the Russians, especially such men as Mouravieff and Saronovitch, cared not what they did, in their hatred of their conquerors.

After Mouravieff's passion had calmed a little under the influence of Saronovitch and the Greek priest, Julian, though deeming it hopeless to advance again the subject of his parole, said firmly, but calmly, 'I cannot believe, Colonel, that you will venture to put your threats in execution against me, for there are higher authorities than you in Russia——'

'Authorities that will believe my report—not yours.'

'Then may I ask what you mean to do with me?'

'You may,' replied the other, twirling his moustache, and eyeing his prisoner's anxiety of mind as a cat might play with a mouse.

'Well, sir?'

'I shall not tell you.'

'Take him outside,' said Saronovitch to the escort; 'we will talk over this affair alone.'

Julian was accordingly removed to a species of verandah that stood before the front of the *traktir*; his right hand was once more secured to the bridle of a Cossack's horse, and there he was permitted to remain under the eyes of an unpitying crowd, while his fate was deliberated upon by the renegade Pole and his superior officer. Though his anxiety was irrepressible, and his annoyance extreme at being made a spectacle to a rabble of Tartars and Bulgarians, mingled with soldiers of the Jakoutsch Regiment, who on the current rumour that he was a Pole, eyed him in no friendly manner, Julian was fain to accept from the Cossacks of his escort some of their odious black ration bread, and a draught of sour

quass from a wooden bowl. Thus hours passed wearily on ; it could not be that they were spent in deliberation concerning him, and he looked anxiously from time to time towards the tea-room of the *traktir*, from which he was not sorry to hear laughter come occasionally. It was evident that the two officers were then talking of other subjects than him, and they were now smoking those fragrant *papirosses*, which were, after the Crimean war, introduced among us as *cigarettes*, just as cigars first were, after the strife in the Peninsula ; they were evidently, too—while leaving their unfortunate prisoner to shiver in the chill autumnal air, enjoying the glow of the ruddy *peitchka*, or brick Russian stove, which is built into the wall, and being open, is sometimes capable of heating even four rooms all at once. Pasted on the wall above it was a Russian caricature of the English Premier bullying the Sultan into war, while a Russian soldier stood near with his bayonet fixed, with a frown on his face, to indicate that if this thing lasted much longer he would have to use it, and cross the Pruth—the movement which really inaugurated the war.

At last Mouravieff and the Pole arose, and after making each a reverence to the Byzantine eikon, or image of some saint, before which a little red lamp was burning in the corner, they came forth. Neither condescended to bestow a glance upon the prisoner, but Mouravieff gave some order or orders in Russian to the noncommissioned officer commanding the escort, who mounted their shaggy ponies ; and just as evening began to close in the march began, a forlorn and heartless one for Julian, who knew not where, when, or how it was to end. After all that had passed, he could but anticipate the worst, if he failed to escape ere too great a distance was placed between himself and his comrades in Kinbourn. Without money, arms, and a horse, if he was taken far it would be hopeless. With a haggard eye, he strove to note the features of the country and commit them to memory as he proceeded ; but utter monotony characterised them all. It seemed a point gained to be away from the brutal Mouravieff, but as to what might be the nature of the orders issued by that personage to the Cossacks the person most interested in them puzzled himself in vain to guess ; and, even had he been disposed to do so, the com-

mander, as he spoke only Russian, was incapable of enlightening him.

Darkness fell, and the stars came out, and after they had proceeded several miles, the Cossacks halted before the gate of a large building, surrounded by a high wall, which Julian conceived, beyond all doubt, must be a prison, and his heart vibrated painfully when with the butts of their lances they thundered on the barrier. Julian, however, was mistaken as to the edifice, which eventually he discovered to be a large convent, and the abode of many Greek nuns. The great gates had been secured, for the inmates had retired for the night ; but that mattered nothing to the Cossacks, who by dint of shouts and not a few curses, as the sound thereof seemed to imply, roused the portress, who opened a door that led into the courtyard, and Julian found himself within the walls of a building of shadowy and mysterious aspect. The Cossacks, six in number, unbitted, unsaddled, and stabled their horses in the court, saw that the gates were secured, and that Julian was also made safe, by having both his hands tied so tightly and close that he could do nothing to escape from them. They then spread their pieces of coarse thick felt on the pavement of the corridor, with their swords and pistols under their heads, and were soon fast asleep. Truly, 'a man's life doth not consist in the abundance of his possessions ;' and no doubt those poor nomads of the Don thought so. Julian remained unnaturally and keenly awake. Notwithstanding all he had undergone, he felt repose impossible ; and he felt that, fettered as he was, the smallest attempt to escape was also the same. His scarred cheek and swollen lips were yet sore and stiff with the blows of the cowardly hand that inflicted them. The novelty of the place in which he sat, or half reclined, against the wooden pommel of a Cossack saddle, somewhat interested him, and almost drew him from his own thoughts. Anon bells rang and some service of the night began ; lights appeared in the long arched corridors, and waxen tapers were lighted before images of saints in niches and on shrines ; and through an open door he could see the sparkling of jewels upon the great altar, and the gleam of the broad metallic horse-shoe shaped halos around the heads of old Byzantine

images. Nuns, arrayed in white, flitted to and fro, looking indistinct and like vapoury phantoms amid the dark or shadowy uncertainties of the long passages, till stillness and silence stole over the place once more, and but for the stertorous snoring of his Cossack escort, Julian might have fancied the whole affair a dream.

Dawn, he thought, must be approaching, when, still forlorn, sad, and full of aching thoughts, he strove to sleep, as he knew not what the next day might bring forth. He closed his eyes as if to court slumber, but opened them again as a light flashed along the arched passage, from a door that opened into it.

The light came from a lamp held by the hand of a woman, who, with eyes shaded by her hand, was regarding the group with some curiosity. That she was a lady was undoubted, by her bearing, grace, and the dazzling whiteness of the hand that shaded her dark and sad, but tender and dreamy eyes. That she was not a nun was evident by her dark dress and the heavy masses of her black braided hair.

To Julian's eye she seemed like a pale, calm, beautiful statue. He rose and bowed, forgetting that in his torn and tattered uniform, with a face plastered with blood, his aspect could not be very prepossessing. She regarded him earnestly and sadly for a moment, gave him a slight bow in return, and shutting the door, disappeared.

Her haunting face seemed like that of a spirit or vision, it was so strangely etherealised. The sadness of her expression seemed to indicate to Julian that she was aware fully that some terrible fate was awaiting him; he knew not what to think; but the longing for a weapon, for action, to be up and doing, made every nerve quiver and every pulse beat like lightning.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE 'FLOWER OF THE FOREST.'

SIR HARRY DRAKE, who soon after the fall of Sebastopol had been prostrated by fever, and had gone to the odious hospital at Scutari, was thankful when able to change his quarters there for rooms in a comfortable Frankish Hotel at Pera, where he remained on sick leave, amusing himself and

watching the course of events. Sir Harry was well up in the list of captains in the Coldstreams ; he was also lieutenant-colonel, for the palmy days of privilege were not yet over ; and he might get a Line Regiment if he wished it ; but the excitement of fighting was past. Ever since the day of the Alma, Sir Harry had felt it to the full, and had enough of it.

He had begun to miss sorely the society to which he had been accustomed. 'Quartered in London, save when at Windsor or Shorncliffe, the Guardsman,' says a writer, 'has every advantage that town life can offer, and can enjoy to the full all the charms and fascinations of good society. Unlike his less fortunate brother in the Line, he knows nothing of dull provincial towns, with their barrack monotonies, garrison-hacks, fifth-rate theatres, and indifferent amusements.'

Thus, fighting over, or nearly so, we say, one of the 'cracks' of the Coldstreams, Sir Harry missed the flirting, lounging, riding, hunting, and the mild duties of St. James's, the Bank, and Buckingham Palace, and shivered when he thought of Pera ; yet there are to be found alike the comforts of Europe and Asia, as its houses are built after the Italian style : it is the head-quarters of diplomacy, and the residence of all the dragomans ; but a man of Sir Harry's temperament soon tired of it, and of the esplanade above the little burying-ground, the favourite resort of the Franks in the summer evenings, as from thence may be seen Stamboul, with all its domes and minarets, its cypresses, kiosks, and fluttering flags, and that part of the Golden Horn where the stately three-deckers of the Sultan are usually anchored.

But the monotony of smoking a pipe there may be varied by walks in the shady cemetery, with all its cypresses, or in those outskirts of Pera where all the fairs and holiday-makings are held, where booths of gay colours are erected, and story-telling, dancing, and singing are heard amid the last homes of the Frank and Armenian. Amid his growing *ennui* Sir Harry experienced a species of fillip by a brief letter from Colonel Kingsmuir, detailing the result of the reconnaissance towards Kherson, and that Julian Melville was either killed or missing—that no trace of him could be found

dead or alive. Sir Harry's natural regret at this event, which had been one of every day occurrence since our landing at Eupatoria, gave place to an emotion of pleasure at the conclusion of the Colonel's letter.

'Only think !' it continued ; 'the Deloraines are coming out here in the Earl's yacht ; what a freak—what an insanity—to this place, of all places in the world ! However, I shall see my little Kate again, and go home with her. Your old friend Amy Kerr accompanies them.'

Most welcome did this news prove to Sir Harry, who looked with genuine relish and longing to the advent of the yacht and its fair passengers, and impatiently awaited her arrival in the Bosphorus.

'Kate,' continued the Colonel's letter, 'tells me that she has a wonderful piece of news to tell, which will astonish both you and me ; but to keep me on the tenter-hooks, the little gipsy is resolved to let me have it verbally.'

Sir Harry naturally thought what news could the Countess have that would interest him, unless it referred to Amy, and that his last letter had led her finally to accept his proposals. His heart beat lightly and happily at the idea. He recalled their parting, and his passionate farewell of her, on the evening before the Guards marched, and he thought of all that passed and all he said, but said in vain, and which, if it was fluent, was not very rational perhaps ; but what love-making ever is ? Amy had relented at last ; the dangers he had dared in the Crimea, the illness he had undergone at Scutari, his unwavering faith and love to herself, had made Amy relent, and this no doubt was the surprising secret of her bosom friend and gossip, the young Countess ! He knew well the rig of the Earl's yacht, the *Flower of the Forest*, and now he spent whole days in making inquiries concerning her, and watching the shipping that came round Seraglio Point ; but she seemed long, long of coming. Meanwhile, the yacht, after long delays at Corsica and Sardinia, Palermo and Trapania, in Sicily, reached Malta, and till then, Lord Deloraine saw none of the newspaper comments or paragraphs, to avoid which, quite as much as to obey his medical advisers, he had travelled Eastward. But, as many of the public prints had preceded him, of course, by steamer, he found Mrs. Kings-

muir, who occupied handsome rooms in an hotel in the Strada Forni, at Valletta, *au fait* at the whole affair of his first marriage, and of all the *on dits* concerning it: 'Remarkable discovery of a lost heir;' 'Romantic event in a noble family,' etc. Certainly, the old lady was in a great fume, and naturally disposed to deem, as a mother, that her darling Kate had been very ill-used in the entire matter, which, had any little ones been forthcoming, would have been much worse; hence, she could barely be civil to Gerard, who accompanied the Earl, and gave the latter such a reception as put poor Kate in floods of tears, and made Deloraine wish that, instead of visiting the Mediterranean, he had sailed in search of the North-West Passage. Mrs. Kingsmuir was undoubtedly a woman of the best style in appearance and bearing; there was something striking in her delicately cut nose, her smooth forehead, and bands of brown hair, growing silvery; but her clear, sharp scrutiny of eye, over, under, and through her gold eye-glasses, worried the fiery Earl of Deloraine. Kate's emotion concerned the Earl most, as his love for her and admiration of her were the chief redeeming points in his character; but as for her mother—

'D—n it!' he muttered; 'it is perhaps a peculiarity of the sex—yet women can never leave well alone. Why should Mrs. Kingsmuir keep nagging at me, and about what—so far as *she* is concerned?'

And it was doubtless apropos of those same paragraphs that Gerard, now with 'Honourable' prefixed to his name, received a communication from the venerable, courtly, and white-haired bibliopole, to the effect 'that his book was finding its way at last—was going up in fact,' that it had actually been pirated in New York, and that another edition of 'The Rhinns' was certain to be called for very soon; a notice with which Gerard, despite his literary ambition, very calmly lit his pipe, as he lounged on the poop of the yacht, and gazed at St. Elmo and all the mighty batteries of Malta, bristling with black cannon tier above tier. Gerard was the least selfish of human beings, and was, moreover, one of the most thoughtful and generous. He had cleared the name of their dead mother, through means given to him by a source bewildering and beyond his comprehension; he had established

his brother's position as Lord Hermitage beyond all doubt and cavil ; of himself he never thought, and life—but for one reminiscence that came to him ever and anon—seemed good, and gay, and happy now, 'like a great bright star come down from heaven.'

Gerard, amid all this, thought of his mother lying far away, and all unpitied in her grave by him who had wronged her, and by cruelty and falsehood broken her heart ; and when he listened to the voice of the Earl, the voice of his father, he strove hard, but in vain, not to think of these things at all. But—

' Kindred blood, our proverbs deem,
Is warmer than the mountain stream,'

and perhaps now, influenced by this, or reconciling himself to the inevitable, the Earl had begun to like Gerard ; he was so gentle, attentive, and considerate to all ; and then his conversation proved ever full of interest, as he seemed master of almost any subject.

There was one thing the Earl could not get over, and yet he never recurred to it. How, when, or where, and from *whom* did Gerard gain intelligence of the existence of those papers on which so much had hinged ?

On that subject Gerard never advanced a hint ; and Kate, proverbial female curiosity apart, from a natural sense of delicacy connected with the whole affair, never questioned him about it.

Gerard felt most delighted when he could hear the Earl talk of the absent Julian, now involved in perils all unknown to them, and of which they could not have the slightest conception ; and, for two reasons, he seemed not disinclined to take a certain interest in his eldest son ; Julian was his heir—the heir to many old ancestral glories ; the other cause, which, perhaps, induced the interest, together with a little human feeling, was his own failing health—failing ere life was much past its prime.

Ere he left London, there were, so said the leading members of the faculty, indications—they might be fanciful, or they might be real—that a cough he had, one exactly the same as his lordship's mother had suffered from ere her early demise, might prove that some complaint of the lungs was

creeping upon him, unless great care—great care indeed—was taken ; so they pocketed the guineas and left him in great fear ; yet he bestowed his malison upon them for the suggestion.

What malady could he be suffering from ?

Past dissipation no one suggested, though many did tonics. Perhaps it was a case of the 'Devil was sick,' etc. Let us hope it was something better ; but there were times when the Earl began to reflect after his own fashion.

'A hacking cough, inflammation in the throat, inhaling steam from a kettle and down in the dumps, d——n it ! here's a situation for the once lady-killing Lord Deloraine !' thought he, as he sat cushioned up in the cabin, with 'a great hulking son,' as he deemed Gerard, hanging kindly over him, when the yacht ran into the harbour of Valletta.

Deloraine feared, yea, had ever hated, the idea of death ; he could never realise it, or the fact that it is as natural to die as to live, or to be born. But now it seemed unpleasantly close, if all those fellows hinted were true, and yet he felt hale and strong. Why should it be ?

His lordship's once luxuriant hair—of which, in times past, he had given away enough to make a wig, in golden lockets—was growing thin now ; though still carefully parted in the middle, it was becoming interwoven with grey hairs to such a provoking extent that to twitch them out was futile, and his valet had even dared to tell him so.

After the unpleasantness of the meeting at Malta, Kate was not sorry when that historic isle was left behind, and also that her irate mother remained at Valletta. She was in no mood of mind, even when tempted to meet her husband, to face a voyage to the Bosphorus, and through the Euxine, in a yacht, however luxuriously it might be fitted up.

And Kate, as the great harbour lights of Valletta melted into the evening sea astern, said, with a bright smile, to her old friend Gerard, that she did not find her life as a step-mother a very trying one ; but she did not add that now the new light shed upon the Earl's past made her position as a wife a disappointed one.

As the yacht hauled up for the Archipelago, Amy felt her heart literally dancing within her at the prospect of seeing

Julian once again, and of all the wonders she was to look upon. She had actually been trying—and blushing so prettily while she did so—how her name looked as ‘Amy Hermitage.’ Indeed, had her blotting-pad been examined, it might have revealed that she had erewhile been testing how it looked as ‘Amy Melville,’ when she knew nothing of the fortune or rank that awaited Julian.

To be the step-daughter of Kate! ‘How strange! what fun! what joy!’ said the two girls together; for matron though she was, in exuberance of spirits, and in years nearly, Kate was but a girl still.

‘Shall I ever win Julian?’ said Amy, dreamily breaking a short silence.

‘Don’t fear,’ said Kate; ‘no woman—especially a charming one like you—ever yet failed in winning any man whom she really loved, or even wished to win through vanity.’

‘Do you really think so?’ asked Amy, brightening.

‘I do.’

‘Oh, what would your mamma think of me, if she heard me speaking thus?’ said poor Amy.

CHAPTER LIV.

OFF STAMBOUL.

By the manner and voice of Amy, when she spoke of Julian to Gerard, the latter—whom she ever found a willing listener—soon discovered that the old love he knew she always had for his brother existed still, and, as he greatly admired and esteemed the girl for her great goodness of heart, purity of thought, apart from the charms of her person and manner, he began to indulge in dreams of a bright and happy future for them both.

‘Gerard,’ said she, one beautiful evening (when the yacht was running steadily on a gentle side wind), when seated among some cosy cushions, on a kind of sofa at the taffrail, ‘have you never been in love?’

‘At home, in Ettrick, you never suspected me of that weakness,’ he replied, smiling into her coy, upturned face.

‘Ah, but since—since you left you must have been in many places, and seen many faces,’ pursued Amy; ‘ah, I see your

colour changes,' she added, laughing; 'and that tells a tale.'

'If I have been,'—he began, and then hesitated.

'With whom—with whom—do tell me; we are such old friends, Gerard!' she said coaxingly.

'Do not ask me, Amy dear.'

'Why?'

'Simply because I cannot tell you.'

'Say, rather, you won't,' she continued, with an affected pout on her cherry lips.

'It is not so, Amy,' replied Gerard, as he thought of, and repeated the lines:

'There are things of which I may not speak;
There are dreams that cannot die;
There are thoughts that make the strong heart weak,
And bring a pallor to the cheek,
And a mist before the eye.'

'And does the memory of your love cause all this, Gerard?' asked Amy softly, while regarding him with an interested and puzzled expression, but Gerard was looking at the horizon and made her no reply.

'You are silent,' she persisted; 'have you never met with your ideal?'

'I have, and—yet have not.'

'You have, and yet have not?' exclaimed Amy, laughing.

'My ideal, you say?' said Gerard, as if full of thought.

'Yes—a Salome, for instance?'

Gerard started at the name.

'She is but a fancy—a character in a novel—an unreality—why speak of her?' he asked, sharply and gloomily.

'Because you spent so much trouble and care in describing her, and we all came to the conclusion that she was the ideal your mind depicted, or dwelt on, as the kind of woman you could love. Gerard,' said the girl suddenly, as she saw that he grew deadly pale, 'have I said aught that pains you?'

'Yes,' said he in a low voice; 'but unintentionally, I know, Amy.'

'Then pardon me,' said the girl, pressing his hand between her own two, and she never resumed the subject, as she saw it contained some mystery that Gerard wished to avoid, or

was striving to forget ; but knowing of old that he was always somewhat of a dreamer, she hoped that, at worst, it was some poetical fancy—some halo cast by imagination round a girl who had deceived him, and that in time it would pass away.

It was with equal delight and excitement that she and Kate too looked forward to beholding those lands and scenes about which all the prints of the day and the thoughts of the people at home were full—localities unknown to the Britons before—Eupatoria, Sebastopol, Balaclava, and the heights of Alma—unknown before, we say, but now ‘familiar in their mouths as household words ;’ for the *Flower of the Forest* was bound for the Euxine, and in due time it was hoped they should see both Julian and Colonel Kingsmuir.

But the Sea of Marmora, Stamboul, Scutari, and the Bosphorus had first to be passed ere the *Flower of the Forest* cleft the waters of the Euxine with her keel.

‘The isles of Greece, and all that sort of thing,’ did not interest my Lord Deloraine now. He had ‘done’ them all years ago, in that same yacht, with the little fair-haired Sonnenberg, and in other yachts with faster companions than poor innocent Kate had the least idea of ; but *blasé* though he was, he found it impossible to observe without amusement and even pleasure the genuine delight of his present companions, who were so guileless, fresh, and full of enthusiasm for everything they saw, every sea-bird that passed them on the wing, and every isle and headland that came in sight, so ‘John Murray,’ and the most powerful lorgnettes were in constant requisition ; as were also—as cicerone—the readily accorded services of Bob Rowlock, the master of the yacht, a fine old ‘hard-a-weather’ seaman, silver-haired and ruddy-faced, who had once been gunner’s-mate on board a frigate under old ‘fighting Charlie’ at the bombardment of Acre and elsewhere ; and thus, by his old instincts, he took great pride in keeping up discipline, and having the yacht’s twelve brass 9-pounders bright as burnished gold, and all her fighting paraphernalia—pikes, pistols, and cutlasses—sometimes necessary in these waters, ‘shipshape,’ and in working order.

The *Flower of the Forest* was a beauty, and the pride of the Royal Eastern Yacht Club, and on a taut bowline Bob Rowlock was wont to aver that she could nearly sail in the

wind's eye, so closely could she be hauled ; yet she was rather taut rigged—a kind of brig forward and schooner aft—of some three hundred tons burden. Her bowsprit and foremast were strong and heavy spars, while her mainmast was long and tapering, and seemed to have too little to support it in the way of shrouds and stays, but these were of great strength and tension.

Her spars aloft were in the same proportion, and tapered away through topgallant and royal mast, till they looked like fishing-rods against the sky. She carried an enormous spread of snow-white canvas, and in port always had the Earl's yellow family banner, with its blue bend, charged with a star between two crescents, flying at the main-mast head ; while his motto, *Amo*, appeared on everything, from the breeches of the brass guns to the silver plate in the cabin.

The latter was fitted up with the luxuriance of the boudoir in Park Lane ; there was even a fernery around the rudder-case filled with beautiful exotics ; but the pictures of famous pets of the ballet, crayons from the round, and nude studies from the antique, with which it had once been hung for the delectation of Deloraine and his former fast friends, had now, of course, all given place to decorations of a very different character.

The yacht was careening over the dancing waves on a taut bowline, heading for the Dardanelles at last. As she ran through the Archipelago she passed the Isle of Serpho to leeward ; and anon Thermia, whose boiling springs flow downward to the sea, rose to windward. Then Negropont—whilom Venetian land, when Venice was in her glory—receded astern, and all around was then a heaving waste of blue and sunny sea, with its skimming and dripping sea-birds, its sense of vast expanse and freedom, its fresh and briny odour and, after a time, the classic shore of Asia Minor came in view.

On an evening of rare loveliness, when the sky was like ether, the entrance of the Bosphorus began to narrow ahead, Eastward the glassy undulations of the sea were rolling in golden light around the point of Chalcedon, but they had tints of silver and crimson in the setting sun, as its rays faded out on the snow-capped summit of Olympus around Seraglio Point, while Stamboul, in all its aspect of external splendour,

rose in view, with its marble domes, gilded pinnacles, that glitter amid groves of undying verdure, its long shadowy arcades, and the carved minarets of more than a thousand mosques.

The canvas of the yacht had barely been furled, and her anchor dropped at the Golden Horn, when a double-oared caique or Turkish wherry shot off from the shore, and, after being nearly swamped or run down by the gorgeous state barge of some official, propelled by sixteen long sweeps, came sheering alongside, and there sprang on board Sir Harry Drake.

He had had early notice of her approach from the Scutari side, and had for the occasion made a more careful toilet than he had achieved since our troops landed at Eupatoria.

The half-soldier, half-brigand costume in which he was wont to figure before Sebastopol had now completely given place to the simple and accurate attire of an English gentleman, and nothing of the Crimea remained about him save his bronzed and sunburnt face, and the bushy beard, which the campaign then first introduced into the hitherto closely-shaven British army, where, save in the cavalry, not even the moustache was then permitted.

The young baronet, after all his roughing it in the trenches, and his sickness at Scutari, seemed happy, hearty, and jolly, for the time so long looked for had come at last.

'Harry Drake, by all that is wonderful!' exclaimed Lord Deloraine; 'now where on earth have you dropped from?'

'Pera last,' replied Sir Harry.

'I thought you were with the army.'

'Been dodging about here on sick-leave—heard you were all coming out, and so waited.'

'All—we are but a small party—the smallest that ever sailed in the *Flower* before.'

Small though it was, it contained all the world held for Sir Harry Drake. A face was before him again—a fair and smiling one, with sparkling dark blue eyes, a row of matchless little teeth, and rippling hair of sunny brown—the face of her he had never ceased to think of, and now the greeting and hand-shaking all round were certainly more im-

pulsive than they would have been in the region of Park Lane.

As for Amy and the young Countess, it seemed as if Sir Harry would never tire of looking in their faces. Since that eventful morning when the Guards marched, followed by the warmest and the proudest wishes of all London, he had seen nothing like them in beauty, style, or costume. They seemed like a glimpse of Regent Street, the Row, and home again, with their charming smiles, their braided hair—braided as only the deft hands of an English maid could do it—their gloved hands and perfect *tout-ensemble*, after Balaclava, Pera, and all the rest of it.

Then he and they had innumerable questions to ask, and answers to receive, concerning mutual friends.

‘How delightful it is to see your fresh and charming faces again,’ said Sir Harry, for the second or third time; ‘by Jove, I have been getting quite savage in my taste among the people here after the wild work at Sebastopol! Of course, you will be doing all the lions of Stamboul, the Seraglio, St. Sophia, the Suliemanlye mosque, and all the rest of it, and I shall be so glad to talk guide-book!’

‘Scarcely, just now,’ said Lord Deloraine, with a little heightening of the colour in his face as he thought of the explanations to come. ‘We are anxious to get a squint at Sebastopol, the place of which all the world talks at present, and then, as Rowlock says, we shall haul up for home.’

‘Oh, yes, we are all dying to see Sebastopol!’ said Amy, full of one thought, and bestowing on Gerard a glance not unnoticed by Sir Harry, who eyed him sharply through his glass, but could detect nothing of the lover in *his* eye or bearing to cause alarm.

‘Many, too many, have had to give their lives for a sight of the fatal place,’ said Kate.

‘I have two months’ leave yet, but shall rejoin soon,’ said Sir Harry to the Earl, while looking furtively at Amy, who seemed wholly occupied with a sleeve-link; ‘the Brigade of Guards is still at Balaclava, but everything points to peace—the Russians have had enough of it!’

‘Peace—thank heaven!’ exclaimed Kate.

‘We can give you a passage back with us,’ said Deloraine,

as he led the way down the polished mahogany stairs to the sumptuous cabin, where servants were lighting the rose-coloured swinging lamps that hung in elaborate chains of Venetian bronze.

‘Then you actually mean to go—and you ladies too?’

‘Undoubtedly, Sir Harry,’ said Amy, a little petulantly; ‘for what else did we come here?’

‘But it seems most eccentric, a trip to the Black Sea,’ persisted Sir Harry, laughing; ‘at this season, too.’

‘But we have our reasons, apart from my—my Lord Deloraine’s health,’ said Gerard, ‘nor are we alone in the fancy. Lord Cardigan has his yacht at Balaclava, and others have gone, while a whole fleet of English yachts went with Napier’s expedition to the Baltic.’

‘Well, I shall be glad to go with you. Wine—thanks. Moselle and seltzer—this is true civilisation!’ said Sir Harry, as Funnell, the old family butler, placed the glittering cut decanters on the table, without fear of having them swept to leeward now.

He glanced at Amy from time to time, but her eyes met his with such perfect confidence and candour that he began to feel intuitively that his case was perhaps a hopeless one still, though he was too much of an Englishman not to have an uncommon amount of confidence in himself.

At Scutari and Pera none of the paragraphs we have referred to had reached him, so he was rather mystified by the presence of Gerard, and ignorant of *who* he was, or in what relation he stood to the little party on board the yacht, and with whom he seemed to be perfectly *en famille*. He had certainly been introduced to the baronet by name, but that, of course did not enlighten Sir Harry.

The latter thought he seemed somewhat familiar—too much so—with Miss Kerr, whom he called ‘Amy,’ while she named him ‘Gerard.’ Was all this to be deemed as indicative of some affair got up since he left London, and had been living like a gipsy before Sebastopol, and facing death hourly in those horrible trenches?

A little time would soon show, he thought, and indeed he soon learned that, as a lover, he had nothing to fear from Gerard, and as the conversation proceeded—they had all so

much to discuss—again he surrendered himself to the soft influence of the girl's beauty and presence ; it was impossible not to feel both powerfully, after all that had passed in London, and after a separation that had seemed so interminably long, by the vast number of exciting and desperate events that were crowded into the term of it; but Amy shrunk nervously from any renewal of the old story, as she seemed suddenly to become aware that the circumstance of *her* coming Eastward in the yacht was liable to put her in a false position with Sir Harry, and rather warranted him in feeling encouraged to renew his addresses.

'I cannot tell how supremely happy I am to see you again, Miss Kerr, and to be near you,' he said in a soft voice. 'Could I but call you Amy !' he added, in a lower and tremulous voice ; 'the title to do so would indeed be some reward after all I have undergone.'

'Ah, you have been in great peril, doubtless,' said the Countess, coming to Amy's relief.

'But never so much as at Inkermann, where a brave fellow, one of our Brigade of Guards, saved my life and protected me from five Russian scoundrels, killing or putting to flight the whole of them, when I was lying helpless under their hands. He was a singular fellow, too,' continued Sir Harry, as he proceeded to tell the story of the *rencontre* at Balaclava, the bottle of wine wanted for the wounded Zouave, and the handkerchief so treasured by the private soldier. 'A handkerchief of *yours* as it proved eventually to be, Miss Kerr,' he continued, 'and for which, as a souvenir of the past, I offered him any money, but in vain. Neither would he condescend to tell me how he became possessed of it,' added Sir Harry with a little hauteur of manner.

'Of mine?' said Amy, in a faint tone.

'Yes ; of yours.'

She was blushing scarlet now, and felt ready to sink, as she perfectly remembered the day and occasion when Julian retained it in remembrance of herself, and a cloud began to gather on the brow of the Earl, who knew the explanations that were at hand ; while Gerard, full of the keenest interest, seemed to drink in the words of the narrator, who, puzzled

by the effect his words produced, was thinking, with a gust of jealous bitterness :

‘ Could she have known and loved this fellow when he was soldiering in London ? Women do such mad things where men are concerned ! ’

‘ He loves me,’ Amy was thinking fondly, amid all her confusion ; ‘ oh, yes, he must surely have loved me then, and does so still.’

She volunteered no explanation, and poor honest Sir Harry proceeded to narrate some other anecdotes of Julian, showing how high was the character he had won, all ignorant of how he was cutting the ground from under his own feet, and fostering and adding to the girl’s most unworldly and romantic regard for one she had never ceased to love.

‘ Then he was an old friend of yours, I presume, Miss Kerr, and had seen better days, Colonel Kingsmuir told me,’ said Sir Harry, breaking an awkward pause.

‘ Yes,’ said Amy faintly, ‘ an old and very dear friend.’

‘ Come ! ’ said Sir Harry cheerfully, ‘ then that explains it all ; but I suppose you have heard what has happened to him ? ’

‘ Happened ? ’ exclaimed his hearers.

‘ Yes,’ replied Sir Harry, now fairly taking courage and warming with his subject ; ‘ a few days after Kinbourn was captured, he served with the column detached for a few miles towards Kherson. He commanded with equal skill and bravery the rear-guard when attacked in the dark by Cossacks ; but when day broke he was found missing, which in Russian hands means neither more nor less than killed, I fear, poor fellow.’

Amy gave a wild glance at Gerard, whose face assumed an expression of horror, and laying her head on Kate’s breast, burst into silent and bitter weeping, which she strove in vain to control, greatly to the astonishment of Sir Harry, who pulled his long moustaches, and looking with perplexity at the Earl, who, to do him justice, seemed greatly startled, said :

‘ Pray forgive me, but I seem most unhappily to be the harbinger of evil tidings here.’

‘ It is the roll of the yacht,’ murmured Amy, forgetting that the brigantine was quietly at anchor in harbour.

'You speak of our dearest friend,' said Kate, in a voice full of sorrow.

'And of my brother, Sir Harry,' said Gerard; 'oh, tell us all you know of this affair—when and how it happened!'

Sir Harry knew little more than Colonel Kingsmuir had told him, with some other, and he hoped exaggerated scraps of information, picked up among sick and wounded men at Scutari, but he repeated all he knew, and kindly strove to rekindle the hope that his first words had crushed at one fell swoop.

Amy's heart was so full of emotion, mingled grief, horror, and anticipation of the worst, that she could scarcely hear rightly after the terrible tidings given by Sir Harry Drake, who was too good-hearted not to feel shocked at the result they produced; nor could she distinguish the voices of those who addressed her or each other. She felt like an automaton, and her sensations were precisely those of Gerard; but great indeed was the young baronet's astonishment when the Earl, taking advantage of the situation, and the sensation excited, with real, or more likely assumed, interest in his voice, and with some dignity of manner, informed him *who* the unfortunate Julian was, 'a son long lost and only found lately—Lord Hermitage,' he was pleased to say.

Julian dead, or a prisoner in the hands of those merciless Muscovites, with whose atrocities the papers had been teeming, since the murder of the Eddingtons and butchering of the helpless Lord Chewton at Alma, to the bayoneting of the wounded in the Redan—it was too terrible to think of! For years past and gone had the loving and affectionate Gerard lived in, and lived on, the anticipation of one day hailing his elder brother as the Lord Hermitage and heir of Deloraine, and clearing their mother's name and fame—and now—now that he had achieved it all, and that the time was at hand to announce it to Julian, where was he?

'How cruel,' he exclaimed, 'is Fate!'

The Earl had, of late, really been desirous of making Julian some reparation—he scarcely knew what—beyond all he had desired his lawyers to do, *per deed*; and *now*—

'The devil—it is just my luck!' thought his lordship, as he

carefully selected a mild Havannah from his silver cigar-case, and handed the latter to Sir Harry.

He was actually not without a certain emotion of compunction at the tidings of the latter. A turn of illness—the cough he had—just such as his mother had, affrighted him, and had not been without a salutary effect upon him ; thus, he was not quite the same callous man who saw Julian crushed under his horse's hoofs, and neglected him so cruelly while in the hands of the doctor. He had schooled himself into accepting and welcoming Julian as the Lord Hermitage—his son and heir, and now he felt a sense of—disappointment at least.

Lord Deloraine had undergone Mrs. Kingsmuir and all the newspaper paragraphs which she had carefully cut out and kept for his special delectation ; he had quite succeeded in pleasing and soothing Kate, whom he had dreaded more than all at first ; and he had supposed, and knew perfectly well, what the gossip of the clubs would be and must have been : ‘Look ye here,’ and ‘Don’t you know—rum story about Deloraine,’ and so forth in the bow windows of Pall Mall.

Now, the estates, failing Gerard, who did not seem to be a marrying man, so far as he could see, would go eventually to the kinsman he so hated, while the ancient title would in the end become extinct !

‘If I should be the Lord Hermitage, after all—after all, and not dear Julian,’ thought Gerard, with a kind of wail in his heart, if we may use the expression, ‘I shall loathe the title ! Oh, I reckoned not on a catastrophe like this !’

To Kate and Amy it had been wonderful as a realised dream to be actually going to sleep in their usual cabins, and in the harbour of Constantinople ! But we fear they slept little that night, for one thought of mingled doubt and terror, filled the hearts of both.

Sir Harry, anxious to put the best face on a bad subject, strove to infuse some hope into the heart of Gerard, with whom he lingered long on the deck of the yacht that night, smoking, and talking of the events of the war, and ever and anon recurring to Julian, till at last he grew weary of the subject ; for he shrewdly suspected now *who* was his rival,

and to feel a very warm or vital interest in the event at Kherson was, perhaps, rather more than might be expected of him.

Constantinople had not then been even partially lit with gas, and as the lights died out in succession in the houses, darkness stole over the city ; but not silence, for the air was literally loaded, as usual, by the howling and barking of the thousands upon thousands of homeless and deserted dogs, waking the echoes of the otherwise deserted streets.

A boat was lowered, by order of Rowlock, to take Sir Harry ashore, after which he had to make his way to his hotel through the lanes of Pera, narrow, muddy, splashy, dark, and disgusting, with high, quaint tenements of wood beetling over them ; but on the morrow he was to join the yacht finally for the Black Sea, and was not without hope, even yet, of ‘making his innings,’ amid the many convenient opportunities afforded by propinquity and a voyage on the waters.

CHAPTER LV.

JULIAN’S PRISON.

DAWN revealed to Julian that the convent to which his escort had brought him, with what ulterior object he could scarcely divine, was near a battery and little village on a high cliff that overhung the sea ; and, as he afterwards discovered, near Cape Kaldantin, which butts into the Gulf of Perekop, about fifteen miles from the mainland of the Crimea, and one hundred from Sebastopol, as the crow flies.

The following day, he expected his miserable route, on foot, fettered to a Cossack stirrup, would begin again ; but it was not so, for the din of brass drums, about noon, announced that Mouravieff had come to Kaldantin with his little column to occupy the village and strengthen the gun-battery ; thus several days passed on monotonously, while Julian remained in doubt and perplexity, a prisoner, in a detached part of the convent, in which his enemy and Saronovitch had established their head-quarters, and in the court of which, overlooking the sea, he was permitted to take the air, but under the supervision of an armed sentry from the quarter-guard.

It soon became apparent that considerable doubt and wavering prevailed in the mind of Mouravieff with regard to the movements of his separate command, which consisted of two battalions, the Jakoutsk and Erivan regiments, with four guns, and some Cossacks ; and also as to the movements of General Liprandi with other troops at Octchaköv.

Reports at this time were current that our troops, after capturing Kinbourn, were about to attack Kaffa, on the south-east coast of the Crimea ; and everywhere it was said that the French field force near Belbec was falling back on a strong position beside the Alma, that a new armament against Fort Constantine at Sebastopol was about to be detailed, and that most of the Russians everywhere else throughout the Crimea were retreating towards the Isthmus of Perekop. Yet Mouravieff, whatever were his views or orders, remained posted near Cape Kaldantin.

Not a man, as yet, could he spare for detached or escort duty ; thus Julian was kept in a degraded and captive state at that solitary place, in sight of the ocean, where, to add to his aggravation, he could see almost daily, but at a vast distance, the white sails, and the smoke ascending high in the air, of the vessels that composed our squadrons in the Black Sea.

When seen or passed, as he sometimes was, by Mouravieff, he was completely ignored by that personage, who never deigned to observe him ; but, luckily for Julian, much of the time of that gallant officer, when not spent amid the works at his gun battery, was devoted to devotion and drunkenness, together with some love-making, whenever he could intercept a lady who resided in the convent, and who had a profound horror of him—the same whom Julian had seen on the night of his arrival, and of whom we shall have more to say anon.

One of the latter's chief disgusts was being compelled to share the meals of his filthy Russian guard, often stale salted fish, tough, coarse ration beef, black bread, and sour *quass*, that made him shudder when he tasted it. He was learning daily that certainly a Russian guard-house was not the place for cultivating epicurean tastes ; while all the delicacies that wealth and culinary art could furnish—Perigord pies, pâtés de foies gras, poultry and game, ham and tongue decorated to absurdity, jellies, creams, and trifles,

hot-house fruits, ices, coffee, and liqueurs—were as everyday condiments on board the *Flower of the Forest*, then just quitting the Bosphorus and rounding Faranaki in Asia—a cape so called from the lighthouse, which points out to voyagers the mouth of the narrow strait.

The convent, in a part of which he was confined, somewhat resembled that of St. George at Balaclava. It consisted of long ranges of two-storied buildings, with corridors off which the cells opened, and at the extremity of these, overhanging the sea, was a chapel with a cupola cut in the form of a pineapple, surmounted with a slender gilded cross, beneath which was a crescent, to symbolise the triumph of the former over the latter—the emblem of the conquered Crimean Tartars.

Daily and nightly, as Julian lingered in the vaulted cell appropriated to his use as a prison, with a straw pallet, and billet of wood for a pillow, or as he trod listlessly to and fro in the court off which it opened, he could hear the singing in the choir. Though unaccompanied by music, much of it was very beautiful, and its pathos more than once deeply stirred the heart of the unfortunate listener, though the language was utterly unknown to him, being the old Russian or Slavonian, instead of modern Greek.

Cliffs and watchful eyes rendered all hope of escape futile to the seaward ; moreover, the battery, perched high in air, would effectually prevent any British or French ship from coming near the coast ; yet daily he could see the white sails of passing vessels shining against the blue horizon. To the landward all was hostile country, inhabited by those to whom his very costume, complexion, and language marked him as an enemy.

Winter was past and spring at hand, and now he began to look earnestly and yearningly over the landscape that stretched away, as he knew, towards Kinbourn, but how distant that fortress might be he knew not. Charming was the view diversified by budding woods and grassy meadows, where large herds of cattle browsed, and where the curling wreaths of grey smoke ascended from picturesque-looking Tartar villages.

Ten miles distant to the east lay—generally half-hidden in haze, the exhalations of its salt lakes—the town of Perekop,

on the flat and grassy isthmus called by the Tartars *Or-kapi*, or 'the gate'—a gate which if the Allies had chosen to *close* with their bayonets, instead of fighting or bombarding Sebastopol, would have ended the war speedily enough.

Apart from his breathless, hopeless desire to escape—for he had long since abandoned all expectation of the parole accorded to an officer—Julian found one source of interest in his present abode—a lady of rare and remarkable beauty, who appeared from time to time among the nuns, and yet seemed to be neither an *interne* nor *externe* of their order. It was she whom he had seen hovering, lamp in hand, and regarding him with sincere commiseration, in the cold and dreary corridor, on the night of his first arrival.

Classic in profile and clearly cut, pure in their expression, and pure in complexion and grave placidity, her features were quite unlike any he had ever seen before. Her manner and bearing were stately, the latter displaying a certain indescribable grace. Her dress was always dark, and her eyes, her hair, and well-defined eyebrows were all intensely black, denoting a foreign origin; yet when she addressed Julian one day she made his heart bound, as she did so in perfect English, saying:

'I am sorry to see you still a prisoner here.'

'And I am likely to remain so, madam,' replied Julian, with a profound bow; 'it is the pleasure of Mouravieff.'

As he spoke she regarded him with a strangely eager gaze, as if his face interested her, or recalled, as perhaps it did, dark though it was, another.

'Have you the misfortune to be a prisoner too, madam?'

'No; not even Mouravieff dare attempt to make me that,' she replied, with the slightest approach to a curl on her lip.

'Are you English?' asked Julian, eagerly.

'No.'

'Russian, then? I have heard you speaking Russian.'

'Yet I am not one; and who I am matters nothing to any one; but you remind me strangely of a friend I once had—even your voice is the same.'

'Perhaps,' said Julian, with indifference, for his mind was full of his own affairs; yet he added, 'Who may this friend have been?'

'I cannot say ; I have known so many—so many,' she replied ponderingly, as she passed a white hand across her broad, low forehead, above which her thick, dark hair was simply braided.

'I can perceive that the conversation' (he did not like to call it attentions) 'of this man—this Mouravieff—annoys you.'

'Oh, not at all.'

'Why, if you dislike him, as I see you do ?'

'I have long since learned to take annoyances easily.'

'Don't you fear him ?' asked Julian, after a pause.

'Fear him ?' She almost laughed, and then added, 'But I greatly fear he means you some deadly wrong.'

'If his open threats are to be believed, he does.'

'What chance have you of release ?'

'None ! Why am I left so completely at the mercy of a wretch like this ? Is there indeed a Providence ?' exclaimed Julian, in his bitterness of heart.

'What do you mean ?'

'Or—God forgive me—are all things chance ?' he added, colouring at the impiety into which passion lured him.

'There *is* a Providence,' she replied, in her grave, earnest way, and with her pathetic tone, 'and all things are *not* chance. Are we not told that there is a special Providence even in the fall of a sparrow ? Take courage ! I have little power here, but I may watch over you, and by dissembling, find out the real intentions of Mouravieff, and shall aid you if I can.'

Julian bowed his face over her hand and kissed it ; but she withdrew it, and retired in haste, as Mouravieff at that moment passed through the court and saw the action. Julian felt his heart thrill, for so perfectly was he aware of the man's character that he half expected to be cut down by his sabre ; but so sudden an ending of his troubles was not then the intention of the Muscovite, who barely gave him a glance, and passed on.

From that hour, however, Julian found his little daily liberty sorely abridged, his promenade being restricted to a species of cloister, the open arches of which faced and overhung the sea, closed by a wall at one end, an iron gate at the

other, and overlooked by a grey-coated and flat-capped sentinel in the adjacent gun-battery.

Thus he feared that the only friend he had was lost to him ; but there was a wonderful individuality about her, in voice, manner, and action, that, apart from the rare character of her beauty, frequently occupied his thoughts. Lost in these, a day or two after, he was intently gazing on the vast expanse of sea that stretched away towards Cape Caramoun, the most western headland of the Crimea, when an old Greek priest, in passing along the corridor, patted him kindly on the shoulder.

Julian started, and, in saluting him courteously, recognised in him the same pastor who had partially sought to afford him protection from Mouravieff in the traktir or tea-house. He wore a long, dark-brown cassock, with a square-shaped cap of the same stuff and colour ; from under the latter his silver hair hung, plaited in two tails, over his shoulders.

In French he condoled with Julian on the unmerited treatment he was receiving ; but could hold out no hope of any amelioration, as the *pulkovnik* of the Jakoutsk Regiment was one who loathed the English personally and collectively, 'and was, in himself, a *mauvais sujet*.'

Julian then ventured to inquire who the remarkable lady was, that promised to befriend him, yet seemed failing to do so.

'Heaven only knows who she is—we do not !'

'Or her nationality?'

'She has none, nor religion either, I fear,' replied the priest, shaking his silver beard, which flowed all over the breast of his brown cassock.

'She seems sad, as one who has known some great sorrow?'

'Sad ! I should think so. In three weeks here she has been rarely seen to smile—laugh never.'

'How is she named?'

'That I cannot tell you ; I only know that she is always quiet, gentle, and subdued—ever kind, good, and prayerful, though to what or to whom she prays is known to herself alone. Her reserve is extreme ; she is ever gracious, but

never communicative as from whence she has come, or whither she is going. We believe that she is a pilgrim of some kind, and will soon be gone from this.'

'Poor thing !'

'We suppose her to be one of high rank, who, in her time, has seen much grief and trouble ; or that some rash act or mysterious deed of her own has brought her to sorrow, and haunts her memory. Prettiness is common enough everywhere, but beauty such as hers is uncommon in its degree, and it certainly seems to have bewildered Ivan Mouravieff. But helpless, apparently, and a waif though she seems to be, he is compelled to respect her, as she bears a special protection from Innocent, the Archbishop of Odessa.'

This was the same prelate who, in his sermon to the garrison of Sebastopol, foretold the *fourth* appearance in the air of St. Sergius, to give them victory at the Alma, where his holy image, borne by the Kazan column, was so nearly captured by the Highland Brigade.

'Nothing,' says a writer, 'can be so hurtful to a man's welfare, or so destructive of his energy and force of character, as the belief that he has no power over his own destiny, and that, do what he may, he cannot alter, in the slightest degree, the ordained course of events.' Julian recalled the time of blind and reckless carelessness, when he had actually courted death, face to face and foot to foot with the foe—when the last solemn tragedy of life was of no more interest than the snapping of a musket !—going forth to the horrible trenches, heedless whether he might perish there, as so many did, by cold or the bullet ; but *now* he had no desire to die, or find the dark and miserable end that the spiteful and dastardly Mouravieff designed for him ; for now he had begun to taste the sweets of success, while the awakening of dormant ambition, that had been gratified, had led him to hope for brighter, better, and greater things.

Existence was hard to resign, now that it had become so well worth having.

'Why was Fate so inexorably hard to him ?' thought Julian. He could not tax his memory with having ever done a wilful wrong to man or woman. Many a time had it been done to him since the hour of his birth—since silence and mystery

hung over the name of his mother—and he had even forgotten or forgiven the offenders ; and now there stole into his mind a bitter pang in the idea that life was a failure, that he was treated with injustice by destiny, by leaving him so hopelessly and utterly at the mercy of this unjust and reckless tyrant—this self-made enemy—Ivan Mouravieff !

Surely he might achieve some means of communication with the outer world ere it was too late—ere he was too far on that terrible journey to some Russian fortress, a fate the end of which heaven alone could foresee !

If not, he was inevitably lost for ever, and must abandon all hope ! Better cast himself headlong on the bayonets of the Jakoutsk Tartars, or on the spears of the Cossacks. His life had been a sad and short one, one of wrong since his birth—he was barely four-and-twenty now—and it was hard, hard, to die, and unavenged !

And amid these corroding thoughts, the refined face of Julian began to look worn and thin.

CHAPTER LVI.

JULIAN'S VISITOR.

JULIAN saw the old priest no more, save once, when more imminent peril menaced him, and death seemed close indeed, for a clergyman though he was, and not naturally of an unkind disposition, in his genuine hatred of 'the island curs, whose soldiers were sailors,' and whom all the ladies of Sebastopol and Bagtche Serai came forth in their carriages to see *beaten* at the Alma, he was in the main, perhaps, tolerably indifferent as to what became of Mouravieff's prisoner ; yet he was not so ungracious as to decline the arrangement of an interview between the latter and the strange lady who had promised to befriend him.

Thus, one evening when the setting sun was reddening the waters of the Bay of Perekop, and Julian, from the guarded cloister, was watching a distant white sail that seemed to hover like a tiny sea-bird on the horizon, he suddenly found her by his side. So full was he of thought, and so softly had she entered, that he had not heard her approach.

'Ah—you have not forgotten me !' he exclaimed, as hope

began to brighten in his heart, and she placed her hand in his.

'You see that I have not,' she replied, with her grave, sweet expression of eye and tone of voice; 'yet in this peculiar place, where I am but the guest of a sister whom I befriended in time past, I am hemmed in by difficulties, and to seem to befriend you, even to speak of you, serves but to excite the anger of the Pulkovnik Mouravieff, who, but for the troubles that menace himself and his force, would have sent you hence long ago. Even now, I have only contrived to come hither, as in consequence of some alarm concerning British gunboats, he has ridden along the coast with his field-pieces.'

'Have I then a hope of escape?'

'Not as yet—nor can I see my way,' she replied sadly; 'but, of this I am aware, that inquiries have been made concerning you.'

'By whom?' asked Julian, eagerly.

'The officer commanding at Kinbourn. The fact of your being alive and *known* to be in his hands seems to trouble Mouravieff; thus I heard him say to Saronovitch, that rather than give you up, he will have you flung over these rocks, and if necessary, assert that you perished in the act of escaping.'

Julian's blood alternately boiled and curdled.

'These are surely but wild words and idle threats!' said Julian. 'Who would perform such an atrocity?'

'For a rouble or two—a copper kopek, more or less—you don't know of what his Cossacks are capable.'

Instinct made Julian glance wildly all about him; but guarded and enclosed as he was on every side, escape seemed hopeless, and the sound of the sea, chafing on the rocks, far down below, like the echo of her terrible words, chilled his blood.

'I can but die once,' said Julian, after a pause, in a voice that seemed half hushed by desperation, 'and must die some time, but surely heaven will make me some reparation, if I perish thus!'

'I hope so.'

'We shall all get there in time, perhaps,' said he, with a

kind of bitter coolness, inspired by the strange calmness of her manner ; for she betrayed little or no natural emotion at the terrible tidings of which she seemed to have constituted herself bearer. 'Yes, it may be, all may reach the great white throne—Russian and Briton ; Christian and——'

'All ?' she exclaimed, with a strange expression of eye and tone of voice.

'Well, even such devils as this Mouravieff, if he repent. But why would he destroy me thus in cold blood ?' asked Julian, after one of those pauses which were filled up by terrible and painful thoughts ; 'he spoke to me of Siberia—or a fortress ; I would rather go to the former.'

'Why ?'

'Because then I should never be without the chance of an escape, and making my story known to the world.'

'Escape ! Better die by your own hand than become the life-long prisoner such as Mouravieff, by writing a simple letter, can make you. Escape ! you know not what you say, or the lives of those unfortunate exiles, as I have seen them.'

'Where ?'

'In the land of eternal snow, and on the banks of the sluggish Lena, in the wild and dreary plains that lie northward of Jakoutsk—the land from whence this very Mouravieff comes. There, once or twice yearly, a crowd of worn-out prisoners arrives escorted by Cossacks. Under the whips and lances of these, or by toil, privation, and despair, many have perished by the way, and been left to feed the wolf and the raven ; and the survivors, nearly dead with sorrow, are sent into the pine forests as slaves, or into the mines, where they never see the blessed sun, but work and sleep—sleep and work, digging for quicksilver under the watchful eyes and sharp lashes of relentless taskmasters ; and when worn with toil, are only permitted to repose in rock-hewn recesses, dark as the grave, filthy as dog-kennels, and into which they must creep on their hands and knees. Soon they become gaunt as skeletons ; their hair and eyebrows drop off ; their teeth fall out ; their joints are racked with pains beyond your conception, because they are produced by the effects of the

quicksilver. Some of these have been, and some are still, those who were the noblest, fairest, and bravest of Poland ! Compared with them, those in the forests are happy ; but what happiness ! Observe one—who he is, or was, no one knows—years upon years ago he came hither in a covered *kabitka*. A smile is never seen on his face ; his hair has long since grown grey. His look is restless and gloomy ; he is always timid, crushed, and silent,’ she continued, almost in the words of Ryeleieff the exile ; ‘he wanders about like one demented, and scowls on all ; but ever and anon he will stretch his hand to the west when he sees the setting sun, and weep the tears of hopeless and insupportable anguish ! Oh, better death than such a fate as that.’

‘And you have beheld all this ?’ said Julian, who felt impressed by her manner, and thrilled by a strange cord in her sweetly modulated voice.

‘I have beheld so much in many lands that nothing can appal—nothing terrify me now.’

Julian regarded her with an interest that bordered on bewilderment. Who or what was she—of what nation (for her refined beauty belonged to none in particular), and of what rank ? Had she been a Siberian exile ?

That she was a lady in bearing and education it was impossible to doubt, though her unstudied gravity seemed almost eccentric ; and that her beauty was strange in its character, as high in its degree, his sense of admiration fully proved. Her creamy skin seemed transparent ; her eyes wondrously dark yet bright ; her whole countenance was etherealised in expression, with an ever present calm about it, as if all that was of the earth, earthy, had passed away, and nothing remained but the Divine spirit.

‘Are you a native Greek ?’ he ventured to inquire.

‘No—learn that I am a wanderer—of no country.’

‘Ah ! whom war has made homeless ?’

‘True ; war with heaven as well as earth,’ was the strange reply she gave ; and Julian began to think her mind unhinged.

‘Surely you bear a heavy cross ?’ said he, kindly.

‘I do—a heavy one indeed !’ she replied, with the nearest approach to emotion he had yet been able to detect in her.

‘And you think it came to you from heaven?’

‘Nay, it was of my own seeking, and must be borne by me, even unto the end.’

‘Pardon me if I have recalled griefs.’

‘I came not here to speak of them, or of myself, but of you, and to aid you if I can. I do not believe, with all his lust of cruelty, that Mouravieff would commit the sudden atrocity he threatened, when he had the alternative of a lingering punishment for you in Siberia; but we cannot trust him—the man by nature and impulse is a savage. You spoke with apparent resignation of dying—you, so young? Have you no friend in the world, for whose sake you would wish to escape the unforeseen toils that surround you?’

‘I have my comrades, and more than all, my dear, dear brother!’ exclaimed Julian, in a voice that grew tremulous, while his eyes became moist.

‘Your brother Gerard?’ said she, calmly, and without any tone of surprise.

‘Know you Gerard?’ he asked, in boundless astonishment.

‘I met him——’

‘When—where?’ he asked again, impetuously.

‘In Germany, and here I soon became certain that you were the Julian of whom he spoke to me so often, in tones of brotherly affection.’

‘How, madam—how?’

‘By your voice, action, and manner; even by your features, though your eyes and hair are dark, and his eyes are light, and his hair golden and crispy. You see my description is correct.’

‘And where now is Gerard—you can tell me, perhaps?’ asked Julian, trembling with anxiety and affection.

‘I cannot—I know not; I have been able,’ she added, dreamily, as if with her eyes fixed on a far horizon, ‘to divine many things, but I cannot tell you that.’

‘And you saw him last where, madam?’

‘At Wiesbaden.’

‘True; he went there, poor dear Gerard!’

‘And there I left him, having to set out hurriedly on a long and devious journey, which, all unforeseen by me, has ended here—indeed, only to begin again.’

'Your name ; may I ask it, madam ?'

'Salome.'

Where had Julian heard that peculiar name, which did not sound quite unfamiliar to him ; but in the late and present perturbation of his spirits, he had forgotten all about the heroine of Gerard's luckless romance. So it was indeed she of whom the Jewish Rabbi, Dr. Ben Ascher, at the Michelsberg, had told that incredible history to Gerard. Julian was ignorant of it, but he was not insensible to her wonderful beauty ; yet it failed to affect or impress him as it had done the more nervous enthusiast and dreamer Gerard. He had seen and knew infinitely less of this fair stranger than the latter, yet the idea occurred to his more practical mind, with reference to her deep and lustrous, yet quiet and dreamy eye, that she must be an opium eater, like De Quincey, Coleridge, and others. This might account for her apparently isolated existence, and the strange world of dreams—a world of her own—filled with visions and references to the past, in which she seemed to dwell. This sudden conviction gave Julian somewhat of a shock, and quelled his half-kindled hope. If she were a dreamer, and thus thoroughly unpractical, instead of enabling him to escape the fate that was intended for him, she might precipitate it. Then he remembered that, though Mouravieff had certainly threatened him with Siberia, he had said nothing about assassination, and he began to think her story might be an opium-derived fancy.

'You doubt me, in some way ?' said she, suddenly, after watching the expression of his face.

Julian coloured.

'Pardon me, madam,' said he, surprised by her strange acuteness ; 'I did but doubt, for a moment, whether Mouravieff is capable of committing the deed you warned me of.'

'You know not of what he is capable. He became colonel of the Jakoutsk Regiment by putting his predecessor out of the world.'

'By assassination ?'

'By giving him a poisoned salve to apply to his wounds received at Alma. He was recovering fast ; but three days after the friendly present of Ivan Mouravieff, then his *chef-de-bataillon*, his blood became a mass of corruption, and the

poor man died in excruciating agony. But the wretch we speak of has returned—farewell, I must leave you.'

As she spoke she hastened away, and Julian knew, by the sharp call of a trumpet, the clanging of hoofs, and rumbling clatter of artillery wheels, waking the echoes of the cloisters and courts of the convent, that Mouravieff had returned from his coast reconnaissance to Kaldantin. By this time the sun had sunk behind the hills of the Crimea, and a dark blue tint had overspread the sea. Ere his morning rays were again to brighten the latter, much was to happen that Julian, when conducted back to his cell, could little foresee.

CHAPTER LVII.

THE BEAR IN LOVE.

WERE this more a novel and less a narrative of true events, we might dilate at greater length on many things than we do, particularly the strange character of Salome. Suffice it to say that she proved as great a puzzle to Ivan Mouravieff as to Julian. When that ferocious commander had left his field battery, tossed the bridle of his horse to a Cossack orderly, and was entering the (otherwise unused) part of the convent, in which, *sans cérémonie*, he had established his head-quarters, as there was no place in the Tartar village close by suitable for his habitation, he met Salome, and proceeded to follow her at once into the garden, whither she was proceeding especially to avoid him. The purity of her Russian perplexed him ; yet she was not a native, he knew and she did not wear the red sarafan, then affected by all patriotic Russian ladies, but was clad habitually in black or other sombre colours. Her beauty dazzled him and inflamed his passions, but while her apparent loneliness and isolation encouraged him on one hand to press his suit boldly, her perfect coolness and confidence, together with something of undisguised contempt, repressed him on the other, while they irritated and surprised him ; hence his mode of conducting his love affair was somewhat remarkable. He saluted an *eikon*, one of the many that stood in the garden walks, and then, saluting her, presented his ungloved hand, which she affected not to see, and was deliberately turning away with a

mere bow, when he confronted her, and laid a grasp, but a gentle one, on her arm, for he was agitated—the bear in love had actually become gentle, but she drew back with an air that showed she shrunk from his touch.

‘Listen to me, madam,’ said he ; ‘ I would speak with you.’

‘What can you have to say to me?’ she asked in a low, quiet voice, while her dark eyes looked fully and unshrinkingly into his, and she quietly fanned herself with a circular fan of black feathers.

‘Much—oh, so much,’ said he, tugging his coarse moustache.

‘So much, Pulkovnik—yet we are almost strangers !’

‘Surely not such strangers now ; but I have that to say which—if heard by you with favour—may alter the whole tenor of your life and mine.’

‘Scarcely either, I fear,’ said she, with a slight curl on her lovely lips, for she seemed too unemotional to exhibit much feeling of any kind ; ‘but I suppose I may anticipate what you have to say—that you love me ?’

‘Yes,’ said he, surprised to find her taking, in her unmoved way, the initiative.

‘Then you may as well seek to woo the moon, or the passing wind.’

‘After all I have said, and offered to do for you, even to lay my life itself, if you wished it, at your feet, this reply is cruel !’

‘Your words are idle ; I wish neither your life nor your love.’

He eyed her gloomily, for anger grew side by side with his passion, which really had nothing of real love in it, and then he said, curtly and bluntly :

‘I do not see why I should not arrest you as an English spy !’

‘Why and wherefore, Pulkovnik ?’

‘You speak English so well.’

‘So do you—thus the less we talk of spies and spying the better. Moreover, I speak Russian with equal facility.’

‘Yet you are not a Russian,’ said he, his black beady eyes beginning to sparkle malevolently, while the scar on his cheek became livid, as it often did when he was excited. ‘Nor a Pole either.’

‘What am I?’

‘Either a prude or a coquette—one, at all events, who seems to take a delight in torturing the hearts of those who see you, and in seeing you, love you.’

‘We have had enough of this ; permit me to pass, Pulkovnik.’

‘Patience yet awhile, and pardon my bluntness, for I am but a blunt soldier, and all unused to speak with one like you, that might grace a crown ; but with your talents, your beauty, and keen power of observation, what a *diplomate* you would make, how invaluable as the wife of a courtier ! Grave, earnest, sensible, and most adorably beautiful,’ he continued, laying a hand again upon her soft arm, ‘you are altogether unlike the generally shallow minds one meets with in the conventional society of cities.’

‘Well?’ said she wearily.

‘Hence I have learned to love you ‘dearly and passionately, with a regard based on the purest admiration. Do give me some little hope, Salome, dearest Salome !’

She heard him quite unmoved, though the man’s breast heaved, his voice trembled, and his eyes expressed certainly as much passion as his coarse Kalmuck nature was capable of ; but no hectic of red, and no greater whiteness, came into the bright—yet in many ways impassible—face of the woman. All emotion had evidently long since been over for her.

‘To what end, or with what view, do you tell me all this?’

‘Can you ask me? To give me your hand in marriage, Salome.’

“Those who wed once wail always,” says your Russian proverb. You actually ask me to marry you?”

‘Yes,’ said he, perplexed by her perfect coolness.

‘You know not what you say, or to whom you say it,’ she replied, in her gentle voice, and without either the slightest accent of anger or annoyance ; ‘you are a man whom I fear few women could love, and I, for one, do not even respect you.’

‘You cannot respect the Colonel of the Jakoutsk Regiment, one who has reached the fifth *tchin* of hereditary nobility? In the name of heaven and St. Sergius, what can you respect?’ asked Mouravieff, more in astonishment than anger.

‘Pardon me if I am rude, but I must leave you.’

‘One word yet, Salome,’ said he humbly; ‘my rank and income—more than all, my prospects under our father the Emperor—will surely satisfy you and your relatives?’

She gave him a shuddering glance, but made no reply.

‘You have some relatives, I suppose?’ he continued.

‘Most people have.’

‘And you?’

‘I have none,’ she replied, looking upward with that air which was peculiar to her, as of one who looked beyond earth for compassion and sympathy, and firmly believed herself to be the most unhappy being in existence.

‘None?’ said Mouravieff, after a pause.

‘Not a human being in all the world claims kith or kin with me,’ she replied, with intense sadness.

‘All the better—then I shall be all the world to you!’ he exclaimed, rather encouraged to proceed by this declaration of utter unfriendedness, till a sudden idea seized him, and he said, ‘Perhaps you are married already? But, no, no,’ he added, taking her shapely white hand in his; ‘you have no marriage-ring!’

‘I am not married,’ she replied meekly.

‘Engaged—betrothed, perhaps?’

‘Nor one, nor other, though they are the same thing.’

‘Then why—why may you not be mine?’ said he, caressingly, and in a low voice, as he bent over her. ‘Oh, Salome if the adoration of a life——’

‘Such as yours?’

‘Yes, Salome.’

‘Poor fool! You weary me.’

‘This is too much!’ he exclaimed, as the gloomy expression came into his eyes, and he stepped back a pace, with his head erect. ‘How unseemly to talk thus to one who would peril existence to please you!’

‘You might please me, Mouravieff, by a smaller hazard. You have in your hands a British prisoner—a mere youth; set him free, and restore him to his countrymen.’

He started as she spoke, and eyed her keenly.

‘If I set free this fellow, in whom you seem to take—why, I know not—an interest, will you try at least to love me?’

'No--not even then.'

'Have you seen him, or spoken with him?'

'Question me not in that tone.'

'If I thought so--if I thought so!' he muttered, as a sudden pang of jealousy wrung his heart.

'I know you have some cruel and dreadful views concerning him, but I beseech you to abandon them, and think of the gratification the act of doing so will afford you, Mouravieff, when your last hour comes, as come it must.'

'Bah! when that hour comes, Salome, I shall turn monk and cheat the devil.'

'As Ivan the Terrible thought to do, by dying in a cowl?'

'Yes--precisely.'

'You pretend to love me, and yet delay in according me this request--an act of simple mercy,' she urged, plaintively.

'You shall be gratified--he shall leave his prison this very night.'

'You promise me, Mouravieff,' she asked, with her soft, sad smile.

'I swear it!'

His eyes glared as he spoke with hoarse earnestness, but, notwithstanding the promise, she could read his secret soul, and knew that the release he intended would be a final and fatal one for the unhappy Julian. Yet she said, in her usual calm way: 'When will you set him free?'

'About midnight.'

'Why so strange a time?'

'I should not wish Saronovitch to know that I set free a prisoner of war. You seem interested in him, Salome.'

'Deeply.'

'I had begun to think you incapable of feeling deeply on any subject.'

'I mean that I am interested in him as much as aught of mankind on earth can interest me.'

'Adieu, then, for the present, Salome. This gratification shall be afforded you. I have given you my promise.'

The bow she gave him was addressed to her fan rather than to him. He raised his hand to the peak of his glazed helmet, according her a salute that was more formal than loving, jerked his sword under his arm, and strode away,

with his breast suddenly inflamed by the most unmeaning jealousy, and resolved that while he pretended to accede to her wish on the one hand, he would secure his own dire vengeance on the other. He believed that she and Julian must have met elsewhere than at Kaldantin, else why did she reply so firmly, 'Question me not'? When, where, or how often had they met, mattered nothing to him now. He could take but sure means to prevent them ever meeting again. Julian would simply disappear, and his place be found vacant in the morning. The story would spread that he had escaped, and that a party of Cossacks had gone forth to scour the roads; these tidings would, of course, reach Salome, and confirm her in the idea that he had acceded to her wish. Salome gazed after this new lover of hers as he withdrew; an inscrutable expression stole into her quiet dark eyes, and then a smile that bordered on something of triumph—an unusual smile for her—spread over her pallid yet beautiful face, as it turned appealingly up to heaven.

The sun set; its last rays faded out on the slender gilt cross and cupola of the little church upon the headland. Darkness stole over the sea and land, and the moon as it rose cast the shadow of Cape Kaldantin far into the Gulf of Perekop; but it shortened, or receded, as the queen of night ascended high through the fast-flying fleecy clouds.

Vespers were over in the convent church; Mouravieff, after duly performing his devotions there, spent the remainder of the night in drunkenness with Saronovitch, the while looking forward impatiently to the time when all the inmates of the edifice, even to the quarter-guard, would be asleep, and none waking but his sentinel on the land side. In the midst of his potations, and of that coarse, ribald conversation in which all Russians are prone to indulge, he paused only when he heard the last bell ring for prayer in the adjacent chapel, and then he turned to the *eikon* and crossed himself, somewhat after the fashion of the truculent Louis XI., and resumed his beverage—Crimskoi wine, strongly laced with vodka. Yet Mouravieff was careful to a degree in the arrangement of his collars, and the spotless brilliancy of his glazed boots, when time and service suited; and was careful, too, in the selection of the faintest and most evanescent of per-

fumes for his handkerchief. From the sergeant of the guard he had obtained the key of the place wherein Julian was placed at night, ostensibly to visit the prisoner, for whose pretended escape he actually meant—for the fuller acting out of his scheme—to punish publicly that luckless non-commissioned officer ; and as midnight drew near and the whole edifice and all therein were sunk in silence, he set out on his infamous errand.

In his relentless, unmeaning, and unnatural rancour to Julian, who had never offended him, he did not require, in the least degree, the additional incentive of jealousy. He was merely armed with a revolver pistol, and the small dagger, about four inches long, which many of the Russian officers were found to carry secretly in the Crimea ; but he was accompanied by two Calmucks, carrying ropes, and one of these had a drumstick and piece of whiplard, wherewith to gag the mouth of their intended victim and stifle his cries. The other had a lantern, the light of which could be concealed at pleasure. These Calmucks were both soldiers of the Jakoutsk Regiment, and men on whose faith, obedience, and silence he could implicitly rely. The countenances of both were extremely forbidding ; they had large heads, round faces, dark olive complexions, high cheek-bones, enormous ears, small black eyes, widely apart, and broad noses that scarcely rose above the level of the face, having, in short, all the peculiarities which distinguish the Calmucks from other nomad nations of Asia, with forms that were almost colossal, and exhibiting, in muscular development, the most herculean strength. They were but one degree above savages, and when summoned by their worthy Pulkovnik, were actually finishing a supper of raw horseflesh, tearing it from the bones which they held in their hands.

Instead of taking the trouble he was about to do in the disposal of his victim, by binding and throwing him into the sea, he might simply have had him shot ; but that did not suit his purpose, and as yet he had no men to spare to escort him beyond Perekop. He soon reached the place of confinement, which was simply a species of cell or dormitory adjoining the open cloister where Julian had his daily promenade, and unlocking the door, entered it. In hot haste he

flashed the light of the lantern round its bare walls ; but the place was empty, and the prisoner—*gone* ! He panted with mingled astonishment and rage ; he could not believe his eyes, and turned the light of the lantern round the place again and again. It glared on the jointed masonry ; it shed its fitful gleam on the repellant visages of the Calmucks—on the Cossack pallet of worn felt, with a bag of straw for a pillow, which had formed the couch of the prisoner, of whom not a vestige remained but his tattered scarlet uniform. He had escaped—but how ? Mouravieff never paused to think, and in his baffled rage and spite forgot all about the part he had intended to act upon the morrow, and his pretended accordance to the desire of Salome ; and he had but one thought—to recapture his victim. To punish the sergeant of the guard he found barely possible, as he had soon convincing proof that the key of the dormitory had never been out of the man's possession till he personally asked for it, and that it hung upon a nail in view of all the soldiers ; but he lost no time in taking vigorous measures.

From the battery he fired two heavy guns, burned blue lights, and sent up rockets to alarm the country. He also despatched some twenty Cossacks or more, with orders to scour all the roads for the distance of twenty miles, as far even as the head of the Sivash, or mud sea, with orders to shoot 'the island cur' if he offered the least resistance on being recaptured. Let those who may deem the brutality of Ivan Mouravieff's character overdrawn merely bethink them of the atrocities of which the Russian troops, officers and men alike, were guilty from first to last in the Russo-Turkish war, and those nameless horrors with which the public prints of Europe teemed, till the nearly unvaried repetition of them sickened, while they palled upon, the reader ; when again, as in the days of which Byron wrote,

' All that the mind would shrink from of excesses ;
All that the body perpetrates of bad ;
All that we read, hear, dream of man's distresses ;
All that the Devil would do if run stark mad ;
All that defies the worst which pen expresses ;
All by which hell is peopled or is sad,'

were daily shown to the world by these fierce Muscovites

when animated by an insatiable thirst for plunder, and maddened by victory.

CHAPTER LVIII.

ON THE WATERS OF THE EUXINE.

PRIOR to some of the preceding events taking place, the *Flower of the Forest* had been ploughing the waves of the Euxine, of old known as the 'Inhospitable sea'—Black only in name, for when thick fogs do not obscure it, nowhere is the sky so clear or serene; but its coasts always appear gloomy, owing to the quantity of wood and forest that covers them. The shallows which ever and anon occur, and are seldom, if ever, marked in any chart, put the seamanship of old Bob Rowlock to the severest proof, and his foreknowledge of the destructive nature of the seaworm, which speedily gnaws its way through the thickest planking, made him warn the Earl that, if he wished to preserve his beautiful yacht, her sojourn in these waters should be as brief as possible. About all this, there seemed, at times, to Gerard, to be an actual or singular unreality, that he should be there—*there* in the Black Sea, in the yacht of the Earl of Deloraine, leading a life of such unwonted ease and luxury, acknowledged as his son, and sailing in search of Julian, who, if living, could know nothing about this sudden change of fortune.

The spring days were delightfully sunny and serene, and serene too were the starry nights upon the moonlit sea; so now and then Bob Rowlock indulged his fancies by clearing away for action, casting loose the guns, getting up pikes and cutlasses, and making a terrible hubbub, to the terror of the Countess's maid, and Mr. Funnell, that most respectable and obese British butler, who thought the Earl mad to cruise in Russian waters, and whose slow, stolid temperament required leisure to grasp any new idea—and being beat up in his shirt at midnight to serve grog all round was certainly one. He regretted now that he had not 'given notice' to his lordship in due time, and now would have to go through it all to the bitter end. Amy Kerr could not reconcile herself to the idea that Julian would never be restored to them—to *her*—or that he was not safe, a mere prisoner of war, kept thus out of

harm's way, and whom the coming peace would be certain to release. Hope thus gave her an air of outward contentment, while the novelty of the voyage in these strange waters, which in some parts seemed to teem with transports and storeships, British, French, Turkish, and Sardinian, afforded an occupation for her mind. Encouraged by the aspect of affairs, Sir Harry Drake became more tenderly attentive, and one day ventured to resume the thread of the old story.

Amy was far more attractive than many handsomer girls, so great was her play and animation of feature. On this day Sir Harry thought she was looking her best ; there was a species of sparkle in her clear, liquid eyes of dark blue, with their straight, dark, and well-defined brows ; her cherry lips and beautiful teeth, and rippling, wavy brown hair, made up a charming whole. As Sir Harry looked at her, he thought the 'odds should certainly be in his favour,' for personally he was above the middle size, not yet thirty, had all the bearing of a man of fashion, was attractive in face and figure, and had now, again, all the easy and light-hearted manner of those with whom the world generally went well.

The Earl was having an afternoon nap in his cabin ; Gerard and the young Countess were in another, no doubt talking on the subject of which he was never weary—Julian. Amy was seated on the cushioned bench beside the taffrail, when Sir Harry drew near her, and after a few preliminary observations, began to sound her views regarding him.

'I was singularly unfortunate at Constantinople, Miss Kerr,' said he.

'How, Sir Harry?' asked Amy, looking not at him, but at the blue waves that were careering past in the sunshine.

'I mean in being the bearer of evil tidings to you all.'

'We must have heard them eventually. Evil tidings they certainly were !'

'To you, I fear, especially ; and to me, perhaps,' he added, on seeing her cheek redden.

'To you—how ?'

'One is apt to dislike, perhaps unconsciously, those who bring them a cause for grief.'

'But I could never dislike you, Sir Harry ; indeed, I never positively disliked anyone.'

'Could you but love me, Amy !' said he, in a low voice.

'Twice already—far, far from this—have I told you, Sir Harry, that I could not. I am very unfortunate, perhaps—the subject pains me—why recall it ?' said Amy, still looking fixedly at the waves.

'Pardon me,' he continued, humbly ; 'but it is hard to cease to hope, especially when with you, Amy, and after all I have undergone.'

'You must not call me Amy.'

'But Mr. Gerard does.'

'Oh, that is very different ; I have known him so long, and—and then——' she paused, and her colour deepened.

'What more ?'

'He is Julian's brother,' replied Amy, in her desperation or confusion, and blushing deeper at the admission.

'And hence may call you Amy ?' continued Sir Harry, regarding her earnestly and with a look of pain.

There was a little pause, and Sir Harry's mind reverted to Balaclava and the episode of the handkerchief.

'Will you pardon me for what I am about to say ?' he asked, in a low, soft voice.

'How can I do so, till I hear what it is ?'

'A question that may pain you to answer, as much as it does me to put it.'

'Then why conceive it ?'

'To end the pain and anxiety I feel.'

'And this question is——'

'How long have you been engaged, Miss Kerr ?'

'Engaged ! Who ? I ? I never was engaged. Who told you so ?' asked Amy, in genuine astonishment, an emotion in which Sir Harry began to share.

'Not engaged ?' said he.

'Never !'

'Not to the missing Lord Hermitage ?—for missing I still hope we may deem him.'

'No—oh, no !' replied Amy, with perfect candour ; 'but what can have made you think so ?'

'A thousand circumstances and suspicions,' said Sir Harry, his heart beginning to brim over with pleasure and confidence again, though he felt a little bewildered at the same time,

'Now that we are on the subject, Miss Kerr, pardon one question more. Does Lord Hermitage love you? Why ask—I cannot doubt it!'

Under all the circumstances, there was something mortifying, almost irritating, in the question so unconsciously asked, and a shade clouded the girl's soft, fair face, but she remained silent.

'He must—he could not fail to do so, if he ever saw you! I judge from the emotions of my own heart. But if aught—the worst, I mean—has happened, would that I could comfort you—as a brother might do—in some way.'

'You least of all!—you least of all!' was the rather cruel reply, almost unconsciously given, to his somewhat blundering speech, while Amy fixed her tearful eyes on the horizon, where sky and ocean met. To Sir Harry she seemed incomprehensible. One fact stood clearly out in his mind—that she was *not* engaged. He had asked the same question of her that Mouravieff had asked of Salome; but the manner and tone of the frank and earnest young Englishman were very different from those of the wily and imperious Muscovite.

'I will intrude upon your confidence no more, Miss Kerr,' said he, 'though I feel that this unrequited love of mine will pervert my whole nature.'

'I hope not—and do not say so; and now I must go below to the cabin,' said Amy, with a bow and a bright smile, as she left him; and, sooth to say, with all his love for her, his nature was too kind and jolly to be perverted. Amy, to do her justice, felt sorry for him indeed. Though in her heart she had no love for him, she could not but pity, respect, and thank him—yea, feel a deep interest in him—nothing more.

He sighed, selected from his case a soothing weed, and as he lit it to leeward, he thought, 'She loves, or has loved another—that fellow with her handkerchief. Well, a second love is not worth having; it is only the ghost of what it should be; and yet—and yet—the girl is winning, so generous and—can't make it out, by Jove! I have been a fool to make myself so miserable about her, and poor Bertie used to tell me so. Shall I ever forget the letter I wrote her before Inkermann? And what has it all come to now?

She'll be certain to chuck herself at that fellow's head, now that he is heir to an earldom !'

But in this idea Sir Harry wronged Amy, as previous passages of our story serve to show.

'I am singularly unfortunate,' said Sir Harry to the Countess, who now came on deck, and whom he partly made his *confidante*, for his old love had been greatly increased by the isolation and close intimacy enforced by a sea voyage. 'She is not and never was engaged, she tells me, to Julian Melville, now Lord Hermitage. I don't know what to think, Lady Deloraine. Do you know if *he* is or ever was engaged?' he asked, with his glass in his eye.

This was an especially awkward question to put to Kate with direct reference to Julian ; but, aware that he had long since forgotten all about the old days at Kingsmuir, so far as she was concerned, she said, stoutly enough :

'He is not, so far as I know.'

'It is all a deuced puzzle to me, and I begin to wish I was back at Balaclava—by Jove I do !' sighed Sir Harry.

Colonel Kingsmuir, now a Major-General and Knight of the Order of Medjidie, was still at Kinbourn ; thus, though the party in the yacht were doubtless anxious to see the wonders of ruined Sebastopol, her course was steered north-east, as they were to receive him on board, and, moreover, it was from him, and in the neighbourhood of Kinbourn, that tidings of Julian were most likely to be found. If not quite out of the way of civilisation, the worthy old soldier had been, for some time past, out of that of direct postal facilities. He had been prepared to meet, somewhere in those regions, the party who were on board the Earl's yacht, when she came to anchor off Kinbourn Spit ; but he was by no means prepared for the 'surprise' given him by his looming Kate, when she, after rushing into his arms with tears of joy, told him *who* the prisoner was who had been reported 'missing,' or in Russian hands.

'There is magic in all this, Kate—beyond even our meeting here in the Crimea !' he exclaimed, after he had fairly taken the whole story in, and warmly welcomed Gerard, while, greatly to the Earl's contentment, he in no way adopted the rôle of Mrs. Kingsmuir at Malta.

The battered bastions of the grim Russian fortress, now garrisoned and guarded by the soldiers who had captured it ; the Zouaves and British troops acting as sentinels side by side ; the foreign shore, with all its Tartar villages and unusual scenery ; the war-ships anchored in the Bay and about Kinbourn Spit, were all objects of secondary interest compared with that which brought the Earl's party so far up the Black Sea.

Kate hung on her father's breast again and again, and when she saw how bronzed he had become, how vast a silver beard he had cultivated, and how, like all the other officers she met, his uniform was faded, patched, and tattered, she felt happy to think she would take him straight home with her soon.

'Papa,' she asked, 'have you had any distinct news of Julian ?'

Kingsmuir's countenance fell as she spoke, and when he replied, Gerard and Amy Kerr listened with anxious hearts, and even the sombre Earl could not help betraying some interest. A Russian deserter, the Major-General stated, had come from Octchakov, soon after the capture of Kinbourn, to the British head-quarters, with some information as to the whereabouts of Mouravieff's column, to attack which was impossible, as he added that 14,000 infantry and 3,000 cavalry were encamped within a league of Octchakov, and that another column, 15,000 strong, was on the south side of Nicholaieff, in the fertile plain near the point of the junction of the Ingul and the Bug.

This man, when closely questioned, admitted that one prisoner had fallen alive into the hands of the Russians when attacking the reconnoitring column near Kherson ; but more he knew not. On this, General Kingsmuir, full of anxiety for his young friend, got no less than three flags of truce sent, to arrange about an exchange for one of equal rank ; and he was thrice assured that Colonel Mouravieff had not a subaltern officer in his hands, but a private soldier, who, for special insolence to himself, would probably be imprisoned for life in a Russian fortress.

'Julian must be dead then—he must have been killed during the conflict in the dark, and fallen unseen!' exclaimed

Gerard, with a moan of anguish, for he and Julian had that in common between them, which none of those present ever had, or could have—the tie of blood and affection, rendered strong and tender by the great sorrows and humiliations of the past. ‘My brother! my brother!’ he exclaimed. ‘Oh, would that I—not you—had drawn the lot of death.’

Amy sat as if turned to stone. Gerard covered his face with his hands and wept aloud. Kate stole her soft arm round his neck caressingly, and even the grim Earl, not unmoved by the scene, placed a hand kindly on the thick crispy curls of his fair head.

Lever says truly, ‘Despair of no man; there are touches of kindness in natures the very roughest, that redeem whole lives of harshness.’

CHAPTER LIX.

A FUTILE FLIGHT.

HAUNTED by the words of Salome, Julian—after regretting that he had not questioned her more about Gerard—began for the first time to think energetically about effecting an escape at all hazards; in attempting it, he could not be in greater peril than menaced him by lingering where he was. All the celebrated desperate and daring escapes he had read of, in history and romance, crowded into his memory, but failed to afford him a hint on which to act. Yet he was in no Bastille or Chateau d’If; in no moated castle or dungeon deep in the earth; but in a simple dormitory or cell in a remote part of the convent. By the fading light he examined the unplastered walls; their joints were massive, and the small window, thickly barred, was high up and near the ceiling; the door, of Russian pine, he knew was thick and strong, hung on great iron hinges, and closed by a lock, the key of which was nightly taken away. He was without a single implement wherewith to pick the lime from the masonry, to attempt to remove or pick the lock, or make a passage through the door, which opened to a species of court, enclosed by a low wall, near which a sentinel was posted. Again and again had he ere this surveyed the place of his nightly detention in all its details, and the conviction came home to his heart now that all idea of escape, unaided, was futile; and he could but quietly,

gloomily, and desperately await whatever was in store for him.

Julian had, in many ways, striven against misfortune and fate long enough now ; but he could not do it for ever, and he felt as if the power of further resistance was dying within him. All the dreams of the future, in which he had begun to indulge since his promotion in the service, were crushed now as completely as those past dreams and hopes that had been fostered by Gerard, of all that he would do and achieve if he ever won his birthright and became a peer of the realm.

If he were to die a sudden and barbarous death, he had a strange craving, a wild longing and desire, that, even after it, he might have the power to acquaint Gerard of his fate, and he actually prayed heaven that he might have this favour accorded to him, certain that if it were, as a spirit, he could find his brother wherever he might be. This strange sentiment or wish sprung perhaps from the common and certainly old Scottish superstition, that the murdered cannot rest in their graves, though the slain in battle may. The daylight faded out, and then the rays of the moon shone coldly through the dingy panes of the grated window, throwing its outline obliquely on the bare wall of the dormitory for a time, until, as the moon rose higher, it faded out, and Julian was left in total darkness, to sit or lie as he chose upon the piece of felt, such as the Cossacks use, that formed his pallet. The hours followed each other in monotonous succession, but Julian was too agitated by terrible thoughts to sleep ; and amid them he felt his heart leap as a key was placed in the lock of the door, an unusual event in the night, and he thought his hour was come ! Every pulse throbbed and then seemed to stand still ; the perspiration started in cold beads on his temples, and he felt, even in the dark, that there was a wild glare in his eyes, as he sprang to his feet with the intention of rushing upon the first man who entered, and by attempting at least to destroy him, anticipate his own doom. Softly and stealthily the lock was turned—the door opened, and in the silvery moonlight, Julian saw only the grand figure and pale, beautiful face of Salome.

‘I have come to save you,’ said she, ‘and you have not a

moment to lose, as I am certain that in another hour or less Mouravieff will be here.'

'I—I have no words to thank you,' said Julian in a breathless voice, and panting as he spoke, for the sudden change from the blackest despair and desperation to the new emotion her words excited almost paralysed him.

'Do not thank me, but act with speed and circumspection. I have discovered, or suspect with truth, what the intentions of Mouravieff are, and even I, who have seen so much of pestilence, war, and horror, shudder to think of them.'

'How got you the key from the guard?'

'I found *another* that fitted the lock—how, matters not—put on this dress and follow me—quick, quick, and delay not.'

She gave him the black fur cap, and short loose caftan and girdle, usually worn by the Cossacks of the Dnieper; he at once relinquished his tattered uniform, and with trembling hands assumed the proffered disguise.

'Heaven reward you, madam—heaven reward you for all this: I may reach Kinbourn unquestioned. But,' he added, 'would that I had a weapon—there is a sentinel——'

'Weapons would not avail you here; noise or alarm are to be avoided,' said she, in her calm, clear voice; 'and while I speak to the soldier, do you pass on and use your utmost speed to leave this place behind you.'

He kissed her smooth white hand, which seemed pale as that of an alabaster statue in the moonlight, and followed her into the court and from thence through a gate, close by which stood the tall figure of a Russian sentry, one of the Jakoutsks Regiment, with his flat forage cap and long grey capote, over which he wore his cross-belts of brown tanned leather. He was standing with his musket 'ordered,' and its fixed bayonet glittered in the moonlight as he turned sharply to see who were approaching his post.

'Pass on, nor pause, nor turn, when I speak to him,' said she, in a hurried and low voice.

As the black beady eyes of the Calmuck soldier fell upon him scrutinisingly, Julian felt his heart beating wildly, and it seemed as if a whole lifetime of fierce excitement were comprised in the vibrations of a pendulum; for if challenged or accosted by the sentinel, he knew not what to reply, and he

was certain of being bayoneted if he stood still, or shot down if he fled. The sentinel shouldered his musket, but ere he could speak, the hand of Salome was on his arm ; her face in all its marvellous beauty was looking up to him, as she asked him some question in Russian, and fascinated, as she well knew he would be, however savage his nature, by her soft voice, her feminine tenderness, and more than all by her pale loveliness, which the moonlight actually seemed to enhance, he forgot all about the Cossack peasant, whom he supposed to be her servant ; and thus, without once looking back to where the great masses of the convent, with its cupolas and domes of copper or tin, gilded or painted green, and so Asiatic in aspect, stood up strongly defined in the flood of silver radiance, Julian took his way down a rocky path that led through a thicket of stunted pines, and the moment he was beyond range of the sentinel's eyes, betook him vigorously to flight. He was to have bitter cause to remember that steep and rocky path by-and-by. His whole object was to get as far away from that perilous vicinity as possible, and to achieve this he bent all his energies, and these were accelerated ere long by the double report of the battery guns, the blue lights that were burned, and the red rockets of alarm that were soaring high in the air when he looked back and saw the convent of Kaldantin about three miles off.

And as he stumbled half-blindly on, he felt more fury than fear of Mouravieff gathering in his heart. Could he but cover that wretch for an instant with a pistol ! Oh, for the winged sandals of Mercury, that he could but reach Kinbourn, or put a few versts in as many minutes between himself and Kaldantin ere day dawned. Approaching sounds made him seek shelter amid the dense underwood of a thicket of caper and turpentine trees, and at that moment a couple of Cossacks, with their lances unslung, dashed past, pursuing the rough highway that led he knew not where, with their rough shaggy little horses at full speed. Oppressed by excitement and all he had undergone, and fearing that he might be proceeding in a wrong direction, as he had only the vague idea that Kinbourn lay to the westward, he deemed it better to remain in concealment where he lay, and to wait till day dawned,

and the first flush of the alarm and pursuit were over. He had no fear of wild animals, though unarmed, and luckily knew nothing about the scorpions and the large black tarantula of the Crimea—a reptile of great size and fearful aspect.

The lights had died out at Kaldantin, and the intense silence around him restored confidence to the agitated breast of the fugitive ; and but for the recent sights and sounds, which announced that his flight had been discovered, he could scarcely have believed that he was free, actually free (though much that was perilous remained to be done), and that his heart, which half an hour before had been chilled by the prospect of a sudden and barbarous death, was now almost bounding with exultation and delight. While lurking there, it seemed to Julian as if the last hours of the past evening, and of this night—the last he thought to spend on earth—were a hideous dream, the details of which were burned into his memory. There were the tinkling of the chapel bells under its copper cupola ; the vesper chanting of the Russian nuns ; the Russian drums in the village and battery below ; the striking of the great *kolokol* or bell of the convent. He could remember that the sky, which had brightened a little in the afternoon, had become dun and sombre in the west, when the sun was sinking behind the clouds ; that the air was unnaturally still, or he thought so, and the wind had died away ; the air had become mild, as the silver moon came out to throw the shadow of the window bars upon his prison wall, and not a sound was heard save the chafing of the almost tideless Black Sea on the rocks far down below, till he heard the key put in the lock, causing the hair of his head to bristle up ; and then there was the face of Salome, which came and went like a beautiful vision. He saw and heard no more of the Cossacks for that night. The broad round disc of the silver moon, wading to all appearance through flying clouds that rolled before the currents of upper air like carded wool, flooded the landscape with light, and nothing seemed in shadow but the thicket where he lay ; and Julian, aware of all he might have to do and encounter on the morrow, strove to court a little sleep, but in vain ; and, judging by some of the stars, and the quarter where the moon shone, of the direction in which

Kinbourn must lie, he again set out on his way, at every pace looking watchfully around him, as he plodded over fields where flax and hemp, and even tobacco, would soon be growing.

He knew that his total ignorance of the language, and his complexion and features, by day, fatally precluded all chance of successfully passing himself off as a Cossack of the Dneiper ; hence his ultimate hope of escape and safety lay in the avoidance of all natives until within reach of the British outposts ; but how was he to exist for perhaps days without food ; how was he to be guided to Kinbourn ? And, on reaching it, he might find the fortress abandoned, and that Sir Houston Stewart's naval squadron had sailed to some other quarter. At all these most natural and tormenting surmises he felt his heart begin to sink again.

The moon waned ; the cold and dark hour of the morning came, and dawn stole in ; the goldfinch, the tomtit, and the sparrow began to twitter about, and the lark and goshawk were soaring aloft as the sun rose over the salt lakes and marshes of Perekop. Julian looked around him with a haggard eye. He could not recognise a single feature of the country ; the way he was proceeding had *not* been that by which his Cossack escort brought him to Kaldantin, and he was painfully aware of the fact. Shrinking for concealment into a clump of wild pear trees, he saw go past him a long line of those *kabitzkas*, or waggons, that are taken to Perekop for salt, where, in dry seasons, a plentiful supply may be had by simply driving them axle-deep into the shallow water, among which it lies in heaps like glittering sand. Whatever was the scenery, or whatever were the features of the country, he knew that he could not be wrong in proceeding westward ; but now he began to miss even the black bread and *quass* with which the Russian guard were wont to supply him, and though it was a land of teeming orchards and vineyards, at that season nothing edible could be found but, perhaps, a half-decayed gourd or the wild garlic.

As the day drew on, the wanderer remained in his place of concealment ; about the roots of the trees, in a little dell, where he sat by the side of a running water, large numbers

of crocuses and snowdrops were coming up, with other wild flowers.

The brawling runnel was a tributary of the Dneiper, and as Julian saw the speckled trout flashing over the brown pebbles among the shallows, and leaping up in the quiet, deep, dark pools, he thought of the Gala and Yarrow at home, in the dear mountain land that was so far, far away—and of happy hours spent beside them with Gerard and Amy and Kate—hours of laughter and innocent merriment.

‘And now to make a little further way westward,’ thought he, but again shrunk back ; he heard the sound of hoofs and the jangle of a chain bridle, and first two and then three Cossacks passed at a leisurely pace, their horses, hardy as they were, to all appearance worn out by rough riding over-night ; and Julian not unnaturally conceived that they were returning to Kaldantin, after a bootless pursuit, and he saw, moreover, that they were leisurely and wearily proceeding in an easterly direction. Could he but reach the shore unseen and make signals to some passing British ship ! But the hope of that was too wild and vague ; so scared had he been by the sudden apparition of the five obnoxious Cossacks, he could only lie *en perdu* where he was, and wait for the night once more.

To him it seemed as if the day, though a spring one, would never pass ; but the sun began to sink in the direction he meant to pursue almost ere he was aware of it, so deeply was Julian immersed in thought. Some limestone rocks that rose between him and the sea, a Tartar village in the distance, some beech-woods where the red deer found shelter, a bit of sandy plain where a flock of bustards could be seen amid the pale green juniper bushes, and the long line of a stony path that led between fields as his eye followed it, and bore towards Kinbourn, as he hoped, were all ablaze and aglitter with light as the sun sank down in its ruddy glory ; and Julian hoped prayerfully in his heart that the coming night might be one such as the last, for he had now a distinct idea of the path in which to steer his way, but most miserably was he disappointed.

The darkness seemed to come on sooner than usual, but there were neither moon nor stars visible ; the whole sky,

from the horizon to the zenith, was enveloped in dense masses of the most sombre cloud when Julian set forth on his lonely way ; and ere long, to make the matter worse, there gradually came over the land a fog from the Black Sea, one of those opaque mists in which the obscurity is so thick that mariners are unable to see a cable's length from their vessels, and when the entrance to the Bosphorus becomes impracticable.

Still, all confusing and damping to the spirit as this event proved, Julian did not lose heart ; he had under foot the beaten track, the stony path he had seen, and manfully and steadily he pursued it for several miles, and began to hope that at last he must be many miles distant from Kaldantin. If retaken he could not fall into worse hands than those of Ivan Mouravieff ; but there was a danger that his costume might cause him to be accused as a spy—a new and deadly peril, of which he had not hitherto thought, and what was called the ‘spy-fever’ had been pretty prevalent in both armies during the war. He occasionally passed a Tartar dwelling, with a courtyard and the usual wooden *porte-cochère* ; but all the inmates were asleep, save, perhaps, a house-dog that barked, and hence made him quicken his footsteps.

The latter were becoming weary, faint, and slow now ; but dawn was beginning to brighten through the mist, though not in the quarter where Julian expected to see it. He had just become conscious of this while ascending a rocky path, when he experienced a chilling shock on hearing a hoarse challenge in Russian from a sentinel who was unseen amid the grey vapour, but whose watchful ears had heard his footsteps. The challenge, which showed but too surely he was close to some Russian post, was followed by another, and by the rattle of the musket as it was brought from the ‘shoulder’ to the ‘ready.’ Then followed the unmistakable sound of its being sharply cocked. Julian felt his heart stand still ; he scarcely dared to breathe, but softly made a detour to the left, avoiding the way he had been pursuing, and found himself among some trees, through which he gently and quietly pushed his way, to put some distance between himself and the sentinel ; and he deemed this shelter fortunate, for day was coming on fast now. At last he left the thicket behind

him, and was in an open grassy space ; then suddenly the dense bank of grey fog drew off, passing upward like a curtain, and he found himself close to a huge edifice, having cupolas and domes of polished copper and gilded tin, and his heart seemed to die within his breast, while a groan escaped him, on finding that after all his toil, care, anxiety and peril, he was within a few yards of the convent-gate at—Kaldantin !

Language cannot convey all the poor fellow felt at this discovery ; he felt ready to sink—‘for the very best of our powers wear out when the soul’s burthen is continued long and long.’ He had only postponed, not escaped, the final catastrophe ; and he was surely abandoned to the Eumenides, those three terrible daughters of Earth.

He had only time to perceive that it was not on that side of the edifice where Mouravieff had his quarter-guard with his sentinels ; and turning with a heart beating wildly, he was about to move off quickly, when he suddenly found himself confronted by the old Greek priest, who was, no doubt, at that early hour abroad on some religious function, and over his cassock wore a rough warm shouba of fur.

‘Here again—here again—after all!’ he exclaimed in French, as he recognised Julian, with something of alarm and much of commiseration in his face, for that of Julian bore equally the traces of hunger and despair.

‘I lost my way in the mist,’ said he, hoarsely ; ‘do you mean to betray me, *mon père* ?’

‘Far from me be the thought,’ said the old man, looking sharply round him to see whether they were observed ; ‘but all this seems destiny—the destiny that points to death. Who can withstand God and the great Novgorod?’ he added, using an old Muscovite proverb. ‘If you fall again into the hands of Mouravieff, not all the wealth of Ivan *Kaleta* will buy your life !’

He referred to the Grand Duke John, surnamed ‘the Purse,’ who always had a great one borne before with alms for the poor.

‘Your escape will in all probability cost poor Ivan Kutchko, the sergeant, and Yury, the sentinel, their lives ; not even the intercession of Salome will save them, and your recapture will avail them nothing ; but follow me quick—come this way.’

Leading Julian down a winding path cut in the rock on which the convent was founded, he, in a few minutes, conducted him into a cell or chapel, hewn out of the limestone, exactly like the hundreds by which the valley of Inkermann is honeycombed, and hewn, doubtless, by the hands of the same race—the Arians of the Chersonesus, when persecuted by the Greek Church. The walls and roof were all of the bare and living limestone rock, but clean and dry ; rock too formed the floor ; there was a large *eikon* or altar at one end, a font, a *prie-Dieu* or two of pinewood varnished, some bearskins to kneel on, and a stair at the back communicating with some other cell or place (all at Inkermann were so connected), and it was lighted by a small glazed window, high up in the wall of rock.

'*Mon ami,*' said the priest, still speaking French, 'this place is mine, and here you can remain in safety till we think what can be done for you or with you. Our chief care must be to conceal your existence and close vicinity from Ivan Mouravieff.'

And locking the door of the cell or chapel upon Julian, he took away the key. Crushed and bewildered, exhausted and worn, Julian threw himself on the bearskins that lay before the altar, and strove to think or to pray ; but his mind was chaos—all ! If once retaken, Julian had not the most remote chance of escape, or even of being permitted to live in any capacity. Mouravieff knew right well how current in Britain and France were the stories of the butchery of the allied wounded, and laughingly called it *mercy* to the foreign dogs ; of the massacre of British seamen at Hango, and so forth ; and he had, perhaps, no wish that the additional narrative of *his* captive should be given to the world. The old Russian priest brought food and wine to the fainting prisoner. He did more, for he brought to him Salome, who, calm, steady, courageous, and unmoved, brought with her hope—hope that he might be saved after all.

CHAPTER LX.

IN THE GULF OF PEREKOP.

THE *Flower of the Forest* had now left Kinbourn astern, and Amy and Gerard saw the flat grassy shores of that part of

the Taurica Chersonesus sink into the sea with natural emotions of disappointment, for the great object of their visit had proved a futile one ; and all that General Kingsmuir, who had now joined the homeward-bound party on board, could urge—against his own conviction—that the new Commander-in-Chief at Sebastopol might have some tidings for them all, failed to raise the spirits of those in the cabin. The long, flat spit melted out of sight before the tall top-hampers of our shipping about it did. So Amy and the Countess had actually been in the Crimea, and seen some of those allied troops, with the fame of whose endurance and exploits all Europe was ringing—our infantry, who had gone storming up the heights of Alma, and had lurked the livelong day in the rifle-pits potting the Ruskies in Sebastopol as coolly as one might do snipe in a bog ; and there, too, had they seen those bronzed and dark-bearded little Zouaves who went swarming, with their wild, triumphant *cri-de-guerre*, through the yawning embrasures of the great Mamelon.

But all interest was merged in the missing Julian, whom all on board spoke of now as the Lord Hermitage ; and if no tidings reached them at Sebastopol, or no hope was held out there, all must be deemed over with him, and the conviction that he perished on the night of the skirmish must be accepted.

A son and heir promoted from the ranks ! ‘Bad form—a deuced beginning !’ thought the Earl, in his secret heart ; but General Kingsmuir was never tired of extolling his old friend Julian, whose conduct had met the approval of all, and won the notice of old Bosquet ; so, at least, there was considerable *éclat* about the affair. Gerard had prepared him in Park Lane to swallow the then unwelcome pill, and now he had but one leading thought—how to act gracefully in the matter ; all the more so that Julian’s name had become—even in the Crimea, that land of strife and glory, where so many deeds of daring were done—a household word. Kate and some others knew what the Earl, to do him justice, did not, and never would know, that much as he had in the past time wronged Julian, he had done more by robbing him, unconsciously, of the girl he first loved. Whatever may be doing, or whoever may be dying, people must eat and drink,

and dine ; and on board the *Flower of the Forest* the dinners were, as usual, perfect, from the *caviare* of sterlet roes, from the Don, to the Chartreuse ; the mock-turtle might be flavoured more or less by Mr. Funnell's heady Madeira, the sirloin be more or less underdone, and the *entrées* a little faulty, when the yacht was on a side-wind and careened well to leeward ; but the repasts were a perfection of which poor Julian, grovelling in his places of prison or concealment, knew nothing now, and had, perhaps, never known.

The yacht, under easy sail, was bearing through the Gulf of Perekop. Though in Russian waters, the presence of the Allied fleets rendered the whole Black Sea as safe as the Medway, yet, when the weather was fine, old Bob Rowlock, with the Earl's permission, was fond, in the spirit of old times, of hoisting his colours and beating to quarters, and, we verily believe, would have liked something to fight with. We have stated that no water was procurable at Kinbourn ; hence, as the tank of the yacht required to be replenished at a part of the coast which appeared solitary and lonely, and where, by the use of the telescope, he discovered a little stream flowing into the sea, between rocks that shelved down to the beach, and were covered with long thick grass, at the lower end of a valley where nothing could approach a watering-party unseen, he had the brigantine hove to within a moderate distance from the shore, and went off in person, with a well-armed boat's crew, to fill some water-casks. Clear, pellucid, and cold, the stream bubbled over the lip of rock, and, plashing on the pebbled beach, mingled with the sea. On every side masses of wild vines and arbutus sprang from the chasms in the limestone rocks, and almost overhung the water in some places. The boat crept close in shore, and the seamen had barely got a cask filled, when one exclaimed :

'There is a signal of recall flying at the foremast head !'

'Why ?' asked Rowlock, leaping ashore.

'Look out ahead, Captain ; there is one of them Russian beggars not far off !' exclaimed another.

Rowlock looked up the long grassy vista of the valley, and there sure enough was a scouting Cossack mounted on his shaggy pony, bustled up in his wooden saddle, with his long

lance slung behind him, its point glittering in the sun. Rowlock sprang into the boat.

‘Shove off,’ he cried, ‘and give way with a will ; there may be many more behind the hill, and perhaps a field-piece or two.’

The watering-party made all speed to rejoin the ship, which at once stood off the shore, after the boat was hoisted in.

The Cossack scout, after watching her motions for a little, wheeled round his horse and vanished at a gallop ; and those on board could little foresee how much that interested them deeply depended upon the report the Muscovite made to his commander, Ivan Mouravieff.

The absolute necessity for obtaining more water made Rowlock go off on the following morning before daybreak to the same spring with more casks, and this he did unmolested, and, as he thought, undiscovered, for two other successive mornings. On the last, while the sun was yet below the sea, the watering-party saw a dark figure suddenly start up from among a little clump of arbutus and approach them.

‘Look out !’ was the general exclamation ; and while some scrambled on board the boat, after being mid-leg in the water, others cocked their rifles and fixed their bayonets and stood instinctively on their defence.

‘*Mes amis—arrêtez, arrêtez donc !*’ cried the stranger, in a voice of excitement and alarm. ‘I am the bearer of a letter for your commander,’ he continued in French.

‘Then give it to me,’ replied Rowlock, sharply.

The man approached the boat waving a letter, and in the first grey light of dawn, was pronounced by the sailors ‘a rum customer,’ for he was no other than the old Russian priest, with his long floating beard, singular hat with its tails or lappets, and his long, loose brown cassock. Rowlock, who had a revolver in his left hand and a drawn sword in his right, placed the latter between his teeth, and received the document, which was without an envelope, and was merely a piece of note-paper on which something was written that without more light could not be deciphered.

‘It is for the officer commanding your ship, monsieur,’ said the old man, propping himself on a long horn-handled

walking-cane, 'and I hope he will fulfil its instructions to the letter, for the slightest mistake may peril all.'

'All what?'

'Your lives and the life of him I wish to succour; *adieu, monsieur le marinier*—I refer you to the letter!' he exclaimed, and hurried away.

'You have either said too much or too little, old fellow,' said Rowlock; 'what the devil can he mean? Can these Russian beggars have poisoned the spring? I've heard of such things in the Gulf of Persia; and, by Jingo, my grog did taste queer this morning. Stretch out for the yacht, lads.'

But the order was scarcely required, for already the sturdy yachtsmen were bending to their oars, and lifting the boat, with its great water-casks, almost out of the water with every strong, steady, and united pull. Soon they came sheering alongside, and while the mates had the boat and casks hoisted in, and the canvas filled to the yard-heads to get off shore and make an offing, Rowlock hurried to the cabin of his master, the Earl, whom he summoned in haste, without the ceremony of sending in a valet to his lordship, who came forth in an elaborate dressing-gown, tied with a silk cord and tassels; and on hearing the summons, his three gentlemen voyagers, the silver-haired General, Sir Harry, and Gerard, came forth from their berths at the same time, all more or less *déshabillé*.

'“For the officer commanding the brigantine, or any other British ship near the Cape,”' read the Earl, on receiving the scrap of paper. 'What Cape, Rowlock?'

'It must mean Kaldantin, my lord—Cape Kaldantin now bears three miles off on our lee bow, I am glad to say, as it is a place we should give a wide berth to.'

'Who gave you this?' asked nearly all together.

'A Russian priest at the watering place.'

'My God!' exclaimed the Earl, his face becoming paler in the light of the early morning, as he ran his eye in haste over the note.

'I am a prisoner in the hands of Colonel Mouravieff at Kaldantin,' it stated; 'he refuses to accept my parole, and I am assured means to do me to death—or worse, by exile—if

not speedily rescued. In heaven's mercy have a boat off the mouth of the cave under the convent cliff to-night, if possible, when a lantern is waved from the rock above, and you may be in time to save me. If not—which God avert—make this letter known to the army and the public.

'JULIAN MELVILLE,
'Lieut. R. S. F.'

'Julian—Julian!' exclaimed Gerard, as he clasped his hands, and softer voices blended now with his.

'Ha!' said Kingsmujr, through his teeth; 'the prisoner the deserter spoke of his Julian, and he yet lives!'

'But in the hands of that unhangd scoundrel, Mouravieff!' added Sir Harry Drake.

Amy covered her face with her hands and wept bitterly, and then it was that, with a generous emotion, Drake put his hand kindly on her shoulder and whispered in her ear: 'Take courage, Miss Kerr—take courage, dear Amy—on the land or the sea we are equally near and under the protection of God!'

'Do you know this place—this cave referred to, Rowlock?' asked the Earl, while Julian's letter was passed from hand to hand again and again, and viewed with the keenest affection, with anxiety and fear, lest its lines might be the last he should ever pen.

'Know it—that I do, my lord,' replied Rowlock. 'I know it but too well; I was wrecked there about ten years ago. You may pull there close in shore, without the use of a sounding-lead, till you may lay a hand upon the rocks, for they rise sheer from the sea like a wall.'

'A boat must await the signal, at all hazards,' said the Earl, calmly.

'All right, my lord; we'll make an offing till evening, then creep in shore and shorten sail, out of reach, if possible, of the gun-battery; but if it should come on to blow——'

'Well?'

'Then, my lord, we can't say what may happen,' replied Rowlock, with a rather troubled expression at the weather glass which hung in the cabin.

Remarkable as some of the coincidences in our story may appear, we must remember that Byron says:

‘ ’Tis strange, but true ; for truth is always strange ; Stranger than fiction.’

It may be imagined how the day—one of the last in March—was passed on board that princely yacht, as she lay off and on, with little canvas spread, in view of the steep cliff crowned by the masses of the Russian-Greek convent, with all its gilded cupolas glittering high in the air, above the mouth of the ocean-cavern that yawned like a great black tunnel, into which, as yet, the tideless waves were running peacefully.

* * * * *

And now to explain how Julian’s letter came to pass, and to fall into the hands of the last people in this world he could have expected to receive it. Another day after his futile attempt to escape might have seen Salome depart to avoid the importunities of Mouravieff, whom the interior economy of a Russian convent gave too many opportunities for the pursuance of his love affair, and to whom she had urged, almost in vain, the protection of the Archbishop of Odessa, and also that, if he persisted, the affair might end, as she predicted, much to his surprise, in his own destruction ; and this idea, with all his innate Muscovite superstition, he ridiculed. The visit from Salome served somewhat to soothe the perturbation of Julian’s spirit, when she came to him calm, serene in eye and grave in manner, clad in her usual dark dress, a floating robe, Julian knew not what ; but looking so lady-like—so like a tragedy-queen, too—with a rich lace veil fastened amid the coils of her glorious black hair, and draped, without study, yet artistically, over one shoulder.

Mouravieff, for some freak of his own, had posted sentinels between the cell wherein Julian lay and the village where the battery stood ; thus, since the punishment of Kutchkou, the sergeant, and Yury, the sentinel, there was not the slightest chance of Julian—disguised though he still was—being permitted to pass them unquestioned ; so that, unless Mouravieff marched off, he might have to remain concealed where he was for a long period indeed. To the Russian nuns—long accustomed to the uneventful system of a conventual existence and the peaceful tenor of an unbroken life—where the same petty incidents, the same hours of prayer,

and the same kinds of duty recurred daily at their stated periods—where all the passions, cares, doubts, and ambitions of the outer world are supposed to have no place, and peace alone is known—the advent in the vicinity, and almost occupation of the convent, or a portion thereof, by the ferocious *Pulkovniks*, Mouravieff and Saronovitch, certainly startled, worried, and terrified them ; but a more stirring event to record in the annals of their secluded lives, was soon about to ensue.

‘How very much of our terrible seasons of distress might he spared us,’ says one of our best female novelists, ‘if we could but see a little further than the present moment—than the atmosphere immediately around’—*i.e.*, to lift the veil of the Future ; but happily for us, in most instances, it is as well that we cannot.

The scouting Cossack we have mentioned had duly reported that a British ship was taking water on board at the spring or stream in the valley, on one or two successive mornings ; but whether it was that Peel’s Naval Brigade at Sebastopol, with their enormous Lancaster guns, had given the Russians a wholesome fear of British seamen ; that the proclamation of peace was nearly signed ; or a doubt of the power of the yacht, which was evidently not a gunboat, and believed to have a heavier battery—we know not ; but, any way, the *Pulkovnik* neither came out with his field pieces, nor molested—though of course his patrols watched—the watering-party.

Thus it was that under the influence of Salome—who had secret plans of her own—the old Russian priest delivered the letter of Julian ; a document written with more despair than hope in his heart. The latter knew not the plan of his mysterious protectress, and was only aware that a British ship—with protection, freedom, and liberty under its colours—was at hand ; but he knew that to attempt to reach the beach, guarded as every point was by Cossack scouts and patrols, was a matter of the most utter impossibility ! Yet Salome seemed to have no fear of success, and in her accent, as she spoke of this to Julian, there was a softness that had a tone of friendship—even of sisterly regard—that would have made Mouravieff grind his teeth had he heard it.

CHAPTER LXI.

OFF CAPE KALDANTIN.

THE yacht, which during the whole day had apparently been going seaward to deceive the eyes of the sentinels in the gun-battery (if they watched her at all), when dusk fell, bore up for Cape Kaldantin, approaching it by tacks that grew shorter and shorter as she came near it ; and fortunately the wind, which was beginning, as Rowlock had feared, to blow a half gale, was off shore. The sky was cloudy ; the moon had not yet risen, and the great dark mass of the headland stood bluffly up in its blackness from the sea, as the yacht crept close in, yet keeping as much as possible out of sight of the battery, and every eye on board watched anxiously for the signal light ; and some there were—we need not name them—who did so with emotions that bordered on agony. Every instant Rowlock was consulting either his watch, the compass, or barometer, and then, anon, the headland.

The night was becoming overcast, and a Black Sea fog, if it set in, might ruin all. He could but bless his stars that, tide what might, the wind was off the land, and not likely to veer about ; but there was rather more of it than he wished for boat work. The last of the lights in the convent, high on the rock, had disappeared. Thick clouds came banking up to windward, rendering the outline of the promontory, and the locality of the huge cavern that yawned therein, less distinct ; some heavy drops of rain began to plash upon the deck, and thunder rumbled on the horizon far away. Hour after hour passed ; the yacht continued making short tacks, yet there was no appearance of the signal. All lights were extinguished on board—no bell was struck ; thus midnight came unannounced—midnight ! Then hope began to die away.

At a great distance to leeward a narrow line of moonlight appeared below the banks of vapour, adding to the weird aspect of the night ; for a time the serrated outline of the black billows between could be seen rising and falling against the shining streak, which faded out as the fog-bank

—for such it was—changed its position, and the wind blew hard and steadily. In short, the night was wild-looking, and Rowlock feared greatly to send off a boat if it increased.

‘If day breaks we shall be blown to pieces by the Russian battery,’ said the Earl, who, like Gerard, was belted, and had, like him, a sword and revolver.

‘Have no fear of the battery, my lord,’ said Bob Rowlock ; ‘we are too close under its guns to be touched, however acutely they might be depressed.’

‘Yet if day broke ere we made a good offing?’ persisted the Earl.

‘By that time I hope we shall have made it,’ said his captain, who, always equal to any occasion, had found among the bunting in store a Scottish ensign—blue, with a white St. Andrew’s cross, the cross of Russia—and had it ready flying at the gaff peak, to deceive, in case day did surprise them ; ‘half-past twelve,’ said he, consulting his watch at the binnacle lamp, which was half hidden by a canvas hood.

‘There goes the light—the signal!’ cried a dozen voices ; and every heart bounded on seeing something like a red spark burning, but faintly, high in air, at the brow of the cliff.

‘Stand by all hands to shorten sail!’ cried Rowlock promptly ; ‘man the fore clue garnets—hands by the peak and throat halyards ; let go tacks and sheets ; clew up ; steady lads ; stand by the falls, and lower away the quarter boat and bring it round to leeward.’

In less than a minute the brigantine lay to, rising and falling on the heavy swell, nearly denuded of her canvas. Neither Kate nor Amy, nor even their female attendants, would go below, but remained on deck, scared by the whole affair, the apparent bustle—yet all was most orderly—and their faces were blanched with fear ; their very teeth chattered as they clung to the belaying pins aft, and looked upon the scene. There was another, too, on board who shared their excitement and alarm, though not their anxiety—Mr. Funnell, the butler, who had taken refuge in his pantry off the dining-cabin. The quarter-boat, so called from being hung from davits over the brigantine’s quarter, in half a

minute was alongside, and General Kingsmuir saw off the party detailed for the shore belted with loaded Minie rifles and cutlasses. Old as he was, he could with difficulty be restrained from accompanying them, though all unfit for such work ; but, ultimately, he agreed to remain with his daughter and her friend, who had but one benumbing idea—a great and terrible event was about to happen, an event connected with Julian, and there seemed, all unused as she was to such scenes and excitements, a horrible unreality about it.

Notwithstanding the chilly hour, and the alleged weakness of his health, Deloraine would go with the boat ; for whatever his defects of character might be, want of courage was not one of them ; for in spirit he was as true a Deloraine as the stark moss-trooper who rode from Branksome to Melrose ; so now he was risking his life, it might be, to save that of one whom he had hitherto ignored, and had well-nigh hated—Julian !

And by his side, too, was jolly, hearty, and gallant young Sir Harry Drake, doing the same for his rival ; because for all that might be foreseen, a volley of Russian rifles was the greeting that awaited them on shore. Though terribly excited, Gerard looked strangely composed and cool, but it was ‘the hush of desperation.’ As the boat was shoved off from the ship the muffled oars dipped in the water, and she sped steadily over the long heaving ground-swells in shore. The red spark had vanished from the brow of the cliff by this time ; none knew what this might portend, but the signal had been given and must be responded to. Higher and higher with every stroke of the oars rose the dark outline of the land ; a little white streak of surf became visible through the gloom, and Rowlock, who had the yoke-lines, knew that when there was a break—a blackness in this streak—the mouth of the cavern was indicated, and he steered straight and steadily for it.

On and on went the boat ; the surf came nearer and nearer ; anon the sound of it would be heard as it chafed on the right and left, and in half a minute more, pulling with shortened oars, the boat was gliding into the dark and ghostly uncertainty of the vast cavern, and its arch of rock yawned high overhead. In a little time the oars touched the walls

of limestone and coarse marble on each side, while a man in the prow stood ready with a boat-hook, and another kept sounding with the hand-lead, which is always used in rivers, harbours, and shoal water ; but the latter was many fathoms deep at the place where further progress was impeded by the rocks against which the prow of the boat grated. Sir Harry Drake had a large ship lantern, but it was deemed as yet unwise to uncover it, lest it might prove a mark for any hostile party. Dead silence was maintained, and all listened intently for any sound that might indicate what was next to happen, for Julian's escape might be frustrated, and all their lives put thereby in deadly peril ; day might dawn ere they could re-join the ship, and if the wind increased to a gale, she might be blown out to sea, leaving the boat the helpless mark for the guns in the battery. Suddenly voices and footsteps were heard, but at a distance apparently ; then a dim light began to flicker amid the far recesses of this ocean cavern, revealing what the darkness had hitherto concealed, long stalactites or fantastic congelations, like the carved pendants and bosses of a Gothic cathedral ; then, as the imperfect light increased, columnar masses like monstrous caryatides, supporting the stony arch, came out in relief ; the scared sea-birds started from their eyries, or nests, and the flapping of their wings on the damp air mingled with the sound of the sea as it murmured, sucked, and gurgled in the far recesses of the hollow vault.

‘ Hush ! ’ said the Earl, as the seamen began to mutter and instinctively cocked their rifles. Gerard shivered with excitement, and seemed again to feel coming over him the strange emotion he had experienced in the train at Zevenaar and on the Rhine, before Salome entered the carriage—the inborn consciousness of her presence and approach.

The boat had thus long since vanished from the sight of all on board the brigantine. Armed with a night-glass, General Kingsmuir was searching for her in vain ; while his daughter and Amy Kerr clung to him, and both uttered a simultaneous shriek when the crack of fire-arms, with a thousand reverberations, was heard, and a great glare of light filled, for nearly a minute, the mouth of the ghastly cavern, and streamed steadily from thence across the water.

Then it faded out and darkness reigned over everything again. What was ensuing there? Who were wounded—who killed? The girls covered their faces, and the old General, kept there inactive like a Highland stag-hound in the leash, panted rather than breathed, in his desire to be in the thick of the fray.

* * * * *

It has been often alleged that though love and sentiment still exist, the days of romance are over. 'Our modern civilisation,' says a writer, 'has set its heel on knightly enterprise. Nowadays, a man could not be chivalrous if he tried ever so hard. Railways, post-offices, and electric telegraphs have made all things easy, and romance is dead!' Yet we have something very much akin to it to relate now.

In the cell or chapel which formed the hiding-place of Julian, we have mentioned that there was a stair hewn in the rock, and formed apparently to communicate with some other place. By that stair it was that his escape was to be achieved. On the appointed night Salome came to him in haste, when all seemed quiet and still in and around Kaldantin, for midnight was at hand. She was muffled in a dark mantle, and carried a lamp, the flickering of which played fitfully on her pale face and snow-white hands.

'Come with me,' she exclaimed, yet calmly and without excitement—for that she never exhibited; 'we have as little time to lose as when last I set you free. Mouravieff has learned how, or suspects, why I know not, that you are concealed among the convent buildings, and even now is searching for you; but he knows nothing of the secrets of this place, though I do. Come with me,' she added, taking his hand in hers; and I will be your guide.'

'Where, madam?'

'To where your countrymen will soon be awaiting you; knowing that at that moment her compatriot, the old *padre*, was secretly displaying the signal from the summit of the cliff.

Ascending the steps, they passed through a narrow passage hewn in the rock, and through a succession of cells similar to that they had left—cells precisely like those at Inkermann, and in one or two of which lay the same kind of empty sar-

cophagi that are found there. The atmosphere, cold and chill, grew colder as they proceeded, and winged things, bats apparently, flitted constantly to and fro, threatening to extinguish the lamp, and snapping their mandibles together with a vicious kind of twitter. There was something inexpressibly weird and dramatic about the whole situation ; but Julian thought only of escape, and not of pictorial effect.

‘ I trust the boat will be at the appointed place ; but the night is a wild one,’ said Salome, as, still conducting Julian by the hand, she led him through a kind of natural gallery, into the upper end of the sea cave, the vague, dark, and remote uncertainties of which her feeble lamp utterly failed to penetrate (though its light and their presence scared the wild sea-birds in hundreds from the shelves of rock where they roosted), while they began to descend the rough and slippery way that led towards its entrance and the water.

‘ How came you to know of this cavern ? Surely it was never trod before by your feet, and yet you act as guide ?’ said Julian.

‘ Ask me not how I came to know it—there are few places hereabout unknown to me.’

‘ You are then a native ?’

‘ No.’

‘ Your country——’

‘ Is far away from here,’ she replied, with one of her sad, dreamy smiles ; ‘ but there is the boat,’ she added hastily, as if to change the subject ; and at a great distance, apparently, they could see it, like a dark object, glide in from the water outside.

Julian’s heart began to beat wildly and hopefully.

‘ And you,’ said he, pressing her soft and velvet-like hand, ‘ you cannot return through this horrid place alone.’

‘ Oh, fear not for me.’

‘ Why, madam ?’

‘ Because I fear not for myself.’

‘ Come with us from among these hated Russians,’ he urged. She shook her head.

‘ You are not of their race. I am certain.’

‘ No.’

‘Nor creed?’

‘No.’

‘Come with me, I entreat you, to a place of safety, beyond the reach of this atrocious Mouravieff.’

‘I cannot—I have a mission to fulfil elsewhere—hark! we are pursued,’ she exclaimed, as voices and heavy steps were heard behind them, waking the echoes of the hollow cells and stone corridors they had traversed, and they had barely reached the edge of the water when the Russian commandant, with three of the Jakoutsk Regiment, appeared; a torch was borne by one, and the footsteps of others thick and fast were heard coming on in hot pursuit, the half-savage Calmucks scarcely knew of whom or what, but luckily armed only with their bayonets. All that followed passed within the space of a minute.

‘Heaven and earth—it is Salome!’ exclaimed Gerard, as he stood erect in the boat, and the light of her upheld lamp fell full upon the pale face of the bearer.

He felt as if his heart had ceased to beat; the walls of the cave, all masses of red or copper-coloured marble, seemed to rock, and rise, and fall around him like the waves of the sea, and he would either have fallen or sprung ashore had he not been instinctively grasped and withheld by the strong hand of Sir Harry Drake, who, as he afterwards said, ‘didn’t know what the deuce was up.’

No operatic tableau could be more striking or dramatic in its effect than this cavern scene for some seconds. A Russian soldier had lighted a fire-ball and cast it on a shelf of rock, where it blazed and sputtered, causing the sea-birds to flit wildly from side to side with flapping wings and shrill cries; and by its strong blue glare of ghastly light, producing weird and fearful forms, with a wondrous variety of reflected tints, mixed with secondary shades, on deep and invisible recesses, and on the watery floor of the cavern, rolling in deep and heavy swells as it was agitated by the sea without, producing singular effects; on the fierce Calmuck visages of the grey-capoted Russians, as they came leaping and stumbling down from the dark recesses of the place; on Mouravieff’s tall figure and excited face; on Salome, standing calm and placid and statuesque, with all her marvellous beauty; and on

Julian, clad like a Cossack of the Dnieper, looking thoroughly bewildered, weary, and worn, shone that unnatural glare.

On the other hand was the boat with its seamen, their glittering cutlasses fixed to their rifles, then ready cocked ; the tall form of the dark-faced Earl ; Sir Harry, in his tattered Guards' uniform, his sword in one hand, the other grasping firmly Gerard, who was gazing like one turned to stone on the pure white face of Salome.

By this time the boat's head had been turned seaward by Rowlock, to be ready for any emergency, and the crossed oars lay still in their rowlocks ; and now, at the sight of the armed boat's crew, the Russians descending the rocks paused and hesitated, all at least save Mouravieff.

Julian had expected a man-of-war's boat, and from the arms, dress, and aspect of the seamen, thought it was one. The Earl and Gerard he never recognised—for he had no thought of them then ; but strange to say, the former knew him by his likeness to *himself*. All this scene, we say, was visible for a few seconds by the weird flame of the fire-ball, which irradiated the whole place, and then began to die out. Ere this, Mouravieff, with a hoarse oath or interjection, had fired a pistol at Julian, but missed him ; ere he could fire again the Earl's revolver had sent a bullet whistling through the brain of the half-savage Russian, who threw up his arms wildly, and, falling with a plash into the water, was seen no more.

Pistol practice was nothing new to Deloraine ; he had more than once covered and winged his man at sunrise on the Bois de Boulogne, and on the flat dreary sands of Dunquerque.

A pistol-shot—fired none knew by whom—now struck Gerard, breaking his left arm above the elbow, and he fell heavily into the boat just as Julian leaped on board and the expiring of the fire-ball left the place in darkness, all save the lamp of Salome, the light of which seemed feeble as a distant star.

She had said that Sonnenberg, and all who ventured to love her, perished. Mouravieff was gone, and it seemed as if Gerard would be the next to follow, as he was bleeding profusely.

‘Away for the ship—give way, my lads!’ cried Rowlock, ‘lay out on your oars—pull for your lives and pull together!’

With fierce, united energy, and bated breath, as the blades in succession seemed to grasp the water, the rowers almost lifted the boat out of it, stroke after stroke, as they shot out of that place of gloom, and were once more upon the open sea. Hand over hand they seemed to near the yacht, from the side of which a lantern was lowered to the surface of the water as a guide. They speedily reached her; all scrambled on board—the boat was hoisted in, the huge fore and aft sails, the fore-top-sail, top-gallant-sail, and the head-sails hoisted up and sheeted home, and with the stormy wind still blowing off the land, with her sharp prow cutting the water, she soon made an offing that rendered useless the guns in the Russian battery, where the glare of port fires could be seen, ere the light of the coming dawn, as it came in, threw forward, in black outline, the sinking headland of Kaldantin—sinking into the sea, with all the domes and cupolas of its convent. Ere this, there had been a scene in the cabin few romances could equal; it embodied so much of explanation, of astonishment, and joy; the first of these emotions was most keenly felt by the rescued when he saw by whom he was surrounded, and learned *who* his immediate preserver was; but the latter emotion was damped by alarm for his brother, who, between his wound and the memory of the face he had seen, appeared for a time well-nigh stupefied. Yet, when in the lighted cabin he again caught sight of the well-remembered, yea, treasured face, looking altered and almost aged by long-suffering, wolfish in eye by facing grim death daily, he uttered a cry of joy, and they were at once locked together hand in hand, and eye bent affectionately upon eye, while moved to tears, for both had undergone much, and each had so much to tell unto the other!

CHAPTER LXII.

CONCLUSION.

WE have said that from Kaldantin it was about a hundred miles, as the crow flies, to Sebastopol, where alone Gerard could get his wound dressed and the bone set, and ere it

could be reached the great abutting promontory of Cape Caramoun had to be circumnavigated ; but Julian had seen much of gunshot wounds, so had Bob Rowlock, and between them they did all that could be done for the sufferer till better aid could be had.

In the yacht of the Earl of Deloraine, with so many friends—for, though small the circle, they seemed many to one so long friendless—acknowledged as the Lord Hermitage, and through the means of Gerard, as Kate told him ! ‘ By what miracle,’ Julian exclaimed, ‘ has all this come about ?’

It was a strange story to tell, as Gerard did so, in solemn confidence ; but to Julian, it seemed a stranger one to hear.

‘ It certainly is not often in this life that improbable dreams of fame and fortune get to be realised,’ says some one, yet in the instance of Julian they were so ; but it seemed as if some time must elapse ere he could comprehend it.

If the Earl felt some shame and compunction for his past conduct to his sons generally—to Julian, when in London, in particular—he was now glad that, by his late display of energy and courage in the rescue, he had made some atonement for the past ; and, indeed, Mouravieff, while losing his own vile life, had given Deloraine an opportunity of acting as he could never have hoped to do. Thus, as Julia Kavanagh says, ‘ Man may repent, God may forgive, and the world never know the sinner’s wrong ; but atonement is seldom or ever within the sinner’s reach.’

So if Deloraine could not atone to Gladys Melville or her father, he could do so at least to Julian and Gerard.

The latter, but for the novelty of Julian’s presence and companionship, would have been inconsolable, and must have striven by some strange fiasco to rejoin Salome, whose story sufficiently perplexed his brother, to whom he alone related it, with a belief so implicit that all the former might urge, or suggest, made but small impression on Gerard.

‘ You will forget her in time, dear fellow,’ said Julian, almost laughing at his brother’s earnestness ; ‘ another will come in her place.’

‘ Another ! we seldom love twice in the same deep and earnest manner in this world.’

‘But did she love you, Gerard? It cannot be always a one-sided affair.’

‘Julian, I will find her, if I wander to the Poles in search of her!’

‘No, you won’t. This is lunacy, Gerard; she evidently does not want you, and can elude and avoid you, by your own account.’

Strong in the heart of Gerard grew the desire to follow and to find her; but whether he ever did so we may tell at a future time. To do so now would far exceed the limits of the present volume.

‘But to think of her being in the hands of these people!’ he continued. ‘She has, you say, a protection from Innocent, the Archbishop of Odessa?’

‘Yes; and if she required that, surely the wild story told you by that old Jew fellow at Wiesbaden must be a fable. But here comes Kate. Oh, Kate!’ added Julian, affectionately, but without an iota of tenderness, ‘as I see you now, with the sunlight tipping your ruddy golden hair, you look—though only a little more matronly—still the Kate of the dear old times at home.’

The days and evenings passed pleasantly, as the yacht, after rounding Cape Caramoun, ran along the rocky coast southward, skirting Eupatoria Bay, in sight of the beautiful and fertile coast round Bagtche Serai, and heading for Cape Chersonese. Meanwhile, they were never weary of hearing Julian comparing notes of recent affairs with the general and Sir Harry, or hearing his modestly told stories (which had all the genuine freshness that actual observation and participation confer) of his Crimean experiences, and of poor Achille Richebourg, the Zouave, whom he never ceased to regret; and as Amy seemed to hang on his words, though his face was thinner, browner, and more hairy than its wont, it was refined as ever, and its old expression of gentleness came back.

‘You’ll land me at Balaclava, Deloraine,’ said Sir Harry. ‘I’ll cut short my leave by a month; but what does that matter—I am better with the corps than here.’ None had welcomed the rescued Julian more cordially or warmly than he; but now he instinctively felt himself *de trop*, and when

the red and copper-coloured bluffs of Cape Aya came in sight, he bade his friends adieu, and joined the brigade on shore, 'a sadder and a wiser man.'

This was on Wednesday, the 2nd of April, the very day when the Treaty of Peace, which had been signed at Paris, was announced to the Allied armies by a salute of one hundred and one pieces of cannon, that pealed like thunder from the heights of Sebastopol, over the green plains of Balaclava, and the caverned valley of Inkermann—yea, far over the waters of the Euxine, from whence the ships of war responded.

On that evening the Earl's yacht hauled up for the Bosphorus, and Julian, as yet unfit for duty, after all he had undergone, went homeward in her.

'How happy—oh, how happy we all are!' said Kate clapping her white hands in almost childish glee, as the beautiful brigantine, careening beneath the soft eastern or landward breeze, sped on its way like a mighty sea-bird, and the far-famed shores of the fatal Crimea faded away astern.

Yes, fatal! for with all the glory we won, it will be impossible to forget the day of the Alma, the charge of the Six Hundred, and that

'Far away, where the bleak winds are sobbing and sighing,
Where Inkermann's heights look across the cold sea,
The graves of thy heroes, oh, Britain! are lying,
Who gave their lives freely for honour and thee!'

* * * * *

In love affairs propinquity achieves great things. Ere Malta was reached, when cloudy 'mamma Kingsmuir' joined the genial old General, and certainly ere the spires of Marseilles came in sight, Kate's prediction, that a woman was always sure to obtain the heart of the man she loved, seemed likely to be verified.

'And you, Amy, have not forgotten me?' said Julian, as they were on deck together alone on a moonlight night, when the swift yacht was bearing through the Archipelago, with all her fore and aft canvas set as she rolled before the wind

and the deep blue waves, that ran careering past, were rolling in silver on the marble rocks of Zia.

‘Forgotten you?’ said the girl, in a breathless and almost upbraiding voice, while her eyes drooped and her heart beat quicker, for the question seemed a leading one; ‘I have ever been proud to hear of you—how noble and brave you have been; and how you have done your duty—especially when I remembered the sad time when we saw you last.’

Julian had never forgotten that time, and he showed her the handkerchief he had preserved as a souvenir of it, and faster than ever beat Amy’s heart, while his swelled with gratitude, which, though not love, is closely akin to it, and, with a lovely girl to inspire it, can scarcely fail to end in a tender passion; and remembering all the past, and the dear old times that seemed so long ago, and yet were not, all Julian’s heart went forth again to the girl who had never ceased to love him. One glance passed between them; each read that, in the eye of the other, which made their hearts thrill, and he drew her close to him.

In truth, this had come about sooner than she expected, Triumph and joy had been in her heart, and she had begun to feel sure of a sweet love-scene with Julian at any moment; but also felt that much was due to herself. He was the same penniless young man she had loved long ago in Ettrick and elsewhere, and over whom she had wept in his illness and sorrow; but *now* he was the Lord Hermitage and the heir to an earldom!

And sooth to say, apart from her affectionate nature, there was much to attract and love in Amy; she had a beautifully-formed mouth, on which a shy half-smile was ever playing; grey-blue eyes shaded by long dark lashes; she was impressionable and accomplished, light-hearted, and had those versatile gifts of mind that gave her so much individuality of character.

And, as their hands met, his lingered for a time caressingly in the firm soft clasp of the slender white fingers he longed to hold for ever, and was free to do so now.

Amy looked up at him shyly, yet tenderly, even as he looked tenderly down on her; his young face seemed haggard still; his eyes, steadfast yet, were softening in ex-

pression, and that sternness which had become the normal indication of his finely-curved lip (now almost hidden by a dark, untrimmed moustache) was passing away amid the more genial influences that surrounded him.

Julian, who with all his enforced wandering and roving was essentially a home-bird, and fond—dearly fond—of his native land, was never tired of talking to her of old times, and of old people they had known in common, when friends and companions at Kingsmuir and Kershope, in pastoral Ettrick, and the days were now passed in unalloyed delight to both.

‘You have been my good angel, Amy, in many ways, although you knew it not,’ said he on one occasion.

The old familiar use of her Christian name on his lips always delighted her.

‘How, Julian?’ she asked.

‘The thought of you, and the knowledge that one so good, so pure, and disinterested as you felt concerned in one whom no one loved save poor Gerard—you, as far removed from me as the moon above the brook—kept me courageous in many a trying hour of desperation and despair.’

‘Poor Julian!’

As Amy listened to his voice she felt as one in a dream, for it summoned so many past memories that were dear to her—the events, associations, and interests of her girlhood at home came back fresh and green, even to the sound of the old church-bells, the forest trees of Ettrick and the solemn hills that look down on the Gala and Yarrow; her eyes were on the shores of the Cyclades, but she saw them not; nor did she hear the rush of the waves, but only the voice of her lover.

Generous and single-hearted though her love had ever been, Amy was too practical a girl to believe in any impossible future; and yet that future, once apparently so impossible, had come, and now Julian was her own!

And so in their present happiness we shall leave them, with a reference to the last appearance of Julian’s name in print, a few months subsequently, when we were told that ‘the Queen had been graciously pleased to confer on the Lord Hermitage the Victoria Cross, for his gallant conduct

in rescuing and remounting Major-General Kingsmuir, during a sortie from Sebastopol, on the night of the 20th October ; also for personally engaging and killing, or putting to flight, five Russians, and thereby saving the life of Colonel Sir H. Drake, of the Guards, at Inkermann, on the morning of the 5th of November.'

'This,' added the *Court Circular*, 'is the same young noble whose marriage with the heiress of Kershope we so lately chronicled.'

So Kate's prediction was fulfilled in every way.

THE END.

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